

, 1887.

of her post-  
men, when  
and marry.  
with a man  
od business  
If you are  
and twenty  
sild. Don't  
you have a  
hat features,

he name of  
his sweet-  
ed that she  
can "grind

o attend,  
d;  
me  
verturnin

ady is not  
an action  
o disagree-  
nem to the  
nd cynical  
uld be ex-  
auspicious  
the lady  
the case of  
e or con-  
or place,

for mend-  
se it, take  
mend one  
a knife  
he edges,  
ery soon,  
at once  
ined and,  
d lined  
the sand  
ing them  
r.

a, who is  
offended  
rself to  
over his  
humour.  
cannot be  
tentious  
carry his  
it worth  
d to let  
with the  
en if he

pollab-  
of their  
et. The  
xcellent  
recom-  
the add-  
cb, and  
bruled  
spirits  
closely  
shake  
ays the  
ough a  
Pro-  
o for a

ou are  
g man  
part to  
same  
better  
ip, he  
If he  
forego  
ons to  
seems  
y and  
choose  
ckle-  
aptain

ence  
print

Part,  
-free,  
ound

on of

as-

and,

DER

THE

# LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1288.—VOL. L.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JANUARY 7. 1888.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["THERE IS NO ONE TO BE ALARMED," NELL SAID, WISTFULLY. "I AM ALONE IN THE WORLD."]

## NOEL LORD ARDEN.

### CHAPTER X.

MR. HARDING listened patiently to Lord Arden's story. Perhaps his own romance of long ago made him take more interest in it than would have been felt by many old lawyers. It was short enough, since Noel merely related the scene in the Foxgrove lanes. The truth he had gleaned since from Mrs. Dane, and his own strenuous conviction that the girl, whose very name he did not know, was in danger. Mr. Harding put on his spectacles, and peered curiously at the young nobleman.

"It seems to me, Lord Arden, you attach more importance to finding this young lady than to the news I told you awhile ago, which threatens your home and fortune. Yet, on your own showing, you have seen her only once!"

"I suppose it was love at first sight?" confessed the Earl. "Anyway, I want you to help me to find her."

"Do you know that she may be engaged to someone else?"

"Possibly."

"Or might have a history which would make you, for the sake of your grand old name, shrink from all thought of marrying her."

"No!" And Noel spoke quite decidedly. "Of her truth and purity I am certain. She might refuse to have anything to say to me, but of this much I am positive—nothing could change my wishes!"

"And what makes you think she is in trouble?"

"I would rather not tell you."

Mr. Harding glowered at the young man a little angrily.

"There are two people," he observed, grimly, "to whom a man should give all his confidence or none—his lawyer and his doctor!"

"Then it was a dream!"

Mr. Harding laughed.

"You are brave, my lord, to own such a thing in the nineteenth century! Do you actually mean to tell me that an Oxford scholar

who has travelled half over Europe yet let his movements be actuated by a dream?"

"Look here, Harding," returned his client.

"You know I come of an obstinate race who always take their own way. I mean to devote my life to finding that girl. Will you help me or not?"

"I will help you with pleasure if you only tell me what I am to do. You see," he added, with a touch of irony, "I was not favoured with a special vision, and so I am a little at a loss how to proceed."

"She is in London, and in trouble. I am sure of these facts. More I cannot tell you!"

"Unfortunately hundreds of women in London are in trouble. What was she going to do?"

"I should say needlework."

"Well, I happen to know the manager of one of the largest outfitting firms. I can get you a list of their employes if you like."

Noel shook his head.

"You see I don't know her name."

"Then advertise."

"I think that's the best idea."

But the advertisements brought no reply.

Noel had been in London a fortnight, and was no nearer success, when a letter came from Lady Nora, urging his return.

Christmas was drawing near. Judith was getting dull; surely he would come home to cheer them up!

Lord Arden was not enraptured by this letter. The uniting his name with Judith's, the inference he was responsible for her enjoyment nettled him. He wrote back rather coldly, told Lady Nora he was quite unable to fix the date of his return; but that if Miss Watts found his mother's society inadequate for her entertainment he should advise her concluding her visit, which had already lasted over two months. As he had nothing to do with inviting her he could hardly be blamed if she found Arden Court dull.

Lady Nora cried over the letter. Things seem going very contrary with her. She had asked Judith, in the warmth of her heart, without fixing any special limit to her visit; and now the young lady seemed to her a little like Sinbad's old man of the sea in that she gave not the slightest sign of taking her departure.

Lady Nora was very fond of Judith, but if Noel had determined not to propose to her, her visits had better come to an end. Yet how to suggest such a thing sorely troubled the good lady's hospitable mind.

She had had a glimpse of the poverty of Judith's home. She saw how she revelled in the luxuries of Arden Court. It was surely an ungrateful task to even so much as hint it was time she went back to Prettyman-road.

Besides, in the first flush of hopefulness, when Noel seemed falling so readily into her plans, she had written to Mrs. Watts, hinting how very well things were progressing; and Kathleen had sent a reply brimming over with satisfaction, and giving her fervent and enthusiastic consent to Judith's engagement.

From that time forth Mrs. Watts's letters were like so many thorns in Lady Nora's path. She wrote very often, and she would take things so for granted. Warned a little by that first rapturous letter of consent Lady Nora grew cautious, and did not mention her son's name in writing to Prettyman-road. Then she took to sending very rare and brief epistles, so that two or three of Kathleen's gushing effusions came between each short note from Lady Nora; but, for all that, the widow had an uncomfortable feeling there would be "trouble" with Mrs. Watts when she discovered her mistake.

Like many another easy-going, kind-hearted woman Lady Nora never kept copies of her letters. She tried in vain to recall exactly what she had said in the fatal one which had worked the mischief, but could not remember precisely.

It was written at a time, she honestly believed, Noel was paying Judith matrimonial attention; and, no doubt, alluded to her own pleasure, at his conduct. She felt instinctively her words would be turned against her.

The Watts's were poor, and, from one or two remarks dropped by Judith, Lady Nora gathered the mother was just a little unscrupulous. Surely she would not attempt to call Noel to account?

Lady Nora grew hot at the very idea. Then she recollected that if her boy declined to marry to please her he was hardly likely to choose a wife just to satisfy Mrs. Watts, and even if Kathleen had the audacity to institute a suit for breach of promise of marriage a young man would hardly be declared bound to a girl because his mother had rashly written he seemed likely to propose to her!

Lady Nora took comfort at this thought, but still Mrs. Watts's insinuations made her uneasy she wrote to Noel, hoping his reply would have something so decisive about it as to enable her to put a stop to the correspondence which Judith's mother made so trying.

Her boy's letter nerved Lady Nora for the conflict. She came downstairs to breakfast, resolved to have an understanding with Miss Judith.

It was all very well to take a fancy to a girl,

and bring her home on a visit, but that she should expect the visit to last for always was quite a different thing.

"No letter from Noel!" exclaimed Miss Watts, seeing none on the salver, and little guessing that her hostess had abstracted that particular letter, and read it upstairs. "How strange!"

Once upon a time Lady Nora had encouraged Judith to speak of her son by his Christian name. The thought did cross her mind now that it was a mistake.

"I have heard from Lord Arden, dear," she said, quietly. "He wrote quite a long letter."

"And when is he coming home?"

The tug-of-war was coming, but the widow was prepared. In the days when she had been a leader of Anglo-Indian society she had had to say one or two strange things to people who would not take hints gently spoken. She felt almost as though that time had come back again.

"His movements are so uncertain that I fear there is no chance of his returning to the Court before you go home."

Surely this was plain enough, but there are some people who won't see a thing if it is contrary to their wishes.

"Oh, I am not in any hurry!" said Judith, sweetly. "And it will be so much better for everything to be arranged before I see mamma."

Lady Nora wondered if it was possible this could be the humble, apologetic, dutifully-disposed girl she had found such a pleasant companion; and, elderly as she was, she blushed, with very shame, for the girl who at seventeen could allude thus boldly to her own prospects.

"I don't think we need Lord Arden's help to arrange about your journey home, my dear," returned her hostess, quickly. "You came here without my son's assistance, and I think I am equally competent to return you to Prettyman-road as I was to bring you here!"

"But things are altered now."

"My dear Judith," said Lady Nora, quietly. "I see no difference in them. I asked you for your mother's sake to pay me a visit. I have found your society very pleasant, but as I am going to spend Christmas with some friends," this was a sudden inspiration, "I cannot ask you to remain with me much longer. The two or three days before Christmas are generally disagreeable for travelling, so I think it will be better if you write to your mother and say you will be home on Monday."

There was a look in Judith's face not quite pleasant to see, but Lady Nora would not notice it. She felt she had accomplished her task—the next moment she was undeceived.

"Mamma thinks you have treated me very badly," was Miss Watts's aggrieved reply.

"I am sorry for it. May I ask in what way?" returned Lady Nora, stiffly.

"You sent Noel away on purpose to prevent his proposing to me. You know yourself he was just going to. You wrote and told mamma so. I suppose you thought it would not be so nice for you when I was mistress here, and so you sent the Earl away; and now you are so mean you want to get rid of me before he comes home."

At that moment Lady Nora rejoiced Noel had not fallen in with her plans. Better Mrs. Watts denounced him on all sides as a perfidious flirt than that such a pitiful creature as Judith should be Countess of Arden.

The perfect breeding, the gentle blood—aye, and the kind womanly heart, too, of Lady Nora—were all shown in her reply.

"You are such a child—you hardly understand what you say, Judith! I grant when I brought you here I hoped your beauty would win my son's affection. I should have been glad to see you his wife; but a mother's taste differs sometimes from her children's, and Lord Arden remained heart whole. I never dreamed of telling you this. I regarded your visit here as a pleasure to myself and you. I never guessed you had come to the Court with the fixed idea of remaining until asked to be its mistress!"

Judith looked a little ashamed of herself. "If you only knew the life I lead at home," she said, bitterly, "the perpetual grinding and screwing, the drudgery with the children, you would understand this place has seemed a paradise."

"And I would gladly have seen you here often Judith, from time to time. I have no daughters of my own, and I would have liked to lighten up your life with holidays; but how can I do so after what you have said to day?" Judith passed one hand across her brow.

"Mamma always told me I should be a great lady. She said I was too pretty for anything else. Nina minded the children and mended the clothes, but I was born for something better."

"Well, my child, you are but seventeen, so I don't think you need despair," said Lady Nora, trying in vain to treat the matter lightly.

"But she said I should be Lady Arden. She said Noel would marry me—that he could not help himself."

"I think she will find she was mistaken."

"And must I really go?"

"It will be pleasant for us both. I shall send my maid to Chiswick with you, for I do not think from what you tell me your mother will care to see me."

Lady Nora said no more. She wrote that very day and accepted an invitation from Lady Brabourne to spend Christmas with her in London; and then she hoped she had settled the hopes of Mrs. Watts and daughter decisively; and resolved that never, never, come what might, would she invite another young lady to come and lay siege to her son's heart.

Judith did not refer to the subject at all. A tranquil Sunday succeeded that very stormy Saturday, and then the next day attended by Lady Nora's own maid, Miss Watts left the house where she had fondly hoped to rule as mistress.

The letter announcing Judy's return reached Prettyman-road at a very unlucky time. It was a week before Christmas, and money had a knack of being scarce, even more than usual, towards the end of a quarter. Then cold weather pressed hardly on the slender funds, and two or three of the children were ill—nothing infectious, but still all enough to be kept in bed.

Poor Nina felt unusually disconsolate on this particular Monday morning. She missed Hubert Herbert sadly, and had been disappointed of an expected letter from him; then her mother had low spirits (a polite term for bad temper); the children were fractious, and she had yet a secret anxiety of her own. The girl whom Hubert had commended to her friendship—whom she regarded as a trust from him, and had, besides, dearly loved for her own sake—had never written to her since the afternoon three weeks before, when she assisted her in her humble packing, and promised whatever happened to trust her still.

Nina did trust her. She was not a nature to doubt where her affection was once given, and she had taken Nell to her heart of hearts; but she was a good deal worried about her. Mrs. Watts, much as she had seemed attracted by Miss Briarley, denounced her in no measured terms when she heard of her sudden departure. She was an adventurer, a swindler, a cheat, and other things too bad to mention. Nina defended her staunchly, and the matter might have been forgotten by Mrs. Watts, but that she suddenly missed a little turquoise brooch, which she declared she lost when Miss Briarley called to see her only the day before her extraordinary disappearance.

In vain Nina protested that Nell was a lady and could not have taken the trinket. In vain she urged she was incapable of such a thing. Mrs. Watts was obstinate; she seemed suddenly to have taken an intense aversion to the missing girl, and brought forward questions which would have daunted a faithless stauncher than Nina's.

"Who else," Mrs. Watts demanded, "had



been into her own room on that special afternoon? Could Nina deny that the brooch was missing, and that she had certainly worn it that morning? What did they know of Miss Briarley? "went on the irate woman. "For aught they could prove she might be an experienced thief. If she was innocent, why did she disappear so mysteriously?"

Nina said bravely that Nell had been discovered by a friend she did not wish to see, hence her flight.

"Her landlady tells a very different story," retorted Mrs. Watts. "Her theory is, the girl was a thief, and the gentleman who came to see her, and was so liberal with his money, turned out to be a private detective. If the girl's innocent, and everything's straight about her, why doesn't she write to you? You treated her like your own sister (much better than you do my precious Judith), and yet she lets three weeks go by without telling you whether she's dead or alive. A pretty friend!"

"There's the postman now," cried Nina, anxious to cut short the tirade; "perhaps there is a letter for me to-day. I'll go and see."

But, alas! she brought back only one letter, and Mrs. Watts's cheeks flushed with pleasure as she recognised her favourite's hand.

"From Judy," she observed, complacently. "I expect everything is settled by this time. You can go, Nina; I shall like to read it to myself."

Nothing loth Nina sped away. It was far pleasanter to toil with the children, or to assist the little servant in household tasks than to listen to Mrs. Watts's exultant account of Judith's prospective grandeur; but poor Nina had hardly reached the kitchen when her mother's bell abruptly recalled her.

"Judith is coming home this afternoon; have everything ready for her, poor dear, suffering child!"

Nina looked bewildered. "Coming home! Will she bring Lord Arden too?"

Mrs. Watts's dignity gave way. "Certainly not. Perjured monster, to dare to trifle with the affections of my darling, but he will find he has me to reckon with, and Judith shall be Lady Arden in spite of his baseness!"

It dawned on Nina there was probably no baseness in the matter. Judith, misled by a little attention, had taken the Earl for a lover, and he had never aspired to the position; but she did not like the vindictive look in her mother's eyes. She felt almost frightened as she saw the workings of the thin mouth and tightly-drawn lips, for she knew, by sad experience, a storm was brewing.

"I shall get up at once," announced Mrs. Watts, as defiantly as though Nina had objected, "and I shall write to the monster this very morning."

"But what has he done?"

"You can read it," said her mother, condescendingly, waving the letter towards her. "My poor, dear, injured child! But Lord Arden shall find she has a mother able and willing to defend her!"

Nina read the note in perfect silence. It was very short, but left no doubt of its meaning.

"DEAR MAMMA,—I shall be home on Monday, having been literally turned out. Lady Nora is as jealous as she can be, and is sending me away for fear Lord Arden should propose to me. I knew he meant to once; but she has great influence over him, and may have shattered all my hopes. If so, he has behaved shamefully. Tell Nina I must have a fire in my room, and I won't have any of the children. I hope you will all try and make up to me for my troubles. I should like to shake Lady Nora.—Your affectionate child,

JUDY."

"Well?"

"I never thought anything would come of it," confessed Nina. "Earls don't marry girls like Judy."

"Go on; disparage your sweet sister as

much as you can. There never was anyone like you, Nina, for slighting your own family."

"Mamma, I love Judy dearly, and she is very, very pretty; but —"

"You don't think her good enough to be a countess?" snapped Mrs. Watts. "Well, she has twice your attractions, and is twice as sensible. You wouldn't see Judy making friends with a girl who lived in one room, and ended by stealing a brooch."

"Nell never stole your brooch, mamma; I would take my oath of it!"

"Then pray where is it?"

Miss Judith arrived about four o'clock. The staid abigail who had attended her only waited until the door was opened, and then would have retired; only Mrs. Watts, who had come to greet her darling, demanded of her whether Lady Nora had already left home.

"No, ma'am," said the woman, civilly enough. "My lady leaves the Court to-morrow, I believe."

"And what is Lord Arden's address?"

A strange question, or it seemed so to Marks, but she saw no excuse for refusing an answer. Her master never made any secret of his movements, and she told Mrs. Watts the number of his rooms in Clarges-street with perfect readiness; then she was allowed to depart.

Mrs. Watts took Judith into the parlour, and Nina went back to the children. The evening dragged horribly. For the first time within man's memory she could see her parents were at variance. When her father came home Mrs. Watts drew him into the parlour, whence Judith had retired, and talked for a long time with great earnestness.

Nina could not guess their difference, but there was a strangely troubled look on his face. When at last released he came downstairs to his evening meal, he hardly spoke till he had finished; then resting one hand on her soft, brown hair he said, gently,—

"Never wish to be rich, Nina! I am not a religious man, but there is one text in the Bible I realise the truth of every day, 'the love of money is the root of all evil.'"

"You don't love it, dad?"

"But those near and dear to me do. Nina, I would rather see you in your grave than know you were ready to sacrifice honesty and truth to ambition!"

Nina nestled up to him.

"I never shall, dad!"

"I hope you will marry someday," confessed her father, "though it will be taking away my brightest sunbeam; but child, don't think about it! If a man is commonly civil to you don't go wondering if he is in love with you—it's horrible!"

"You are thinking of Judy, father. Don't be vexed with her; she is only seventeen. She will forget her foolish fancies when she is a little older."

"I don't think she will be allowed to forget, Nina. I was always against her going to Arden Court, and I wish now I had made a stand, and taken my own way. It would have been better for her, and I could have held up my head then like an honest man. Now, if your mother keeps to her purpose, I shall be ashamed to look anyone in the face."

"But mother can't persist if you tell her that! What is it she wants to do?"

"I had rather not tell you, Nina. You couldn't turn her from her purpose, and your knowing would only trouble you. I wish, with all my heart, Moselle had been in England. I'd have set him to talk to her."

Nina blushed.

"He would not persuade her if you failed. Mother loves you, and I think sometimes she has a quite an aversion to Hubert."

"But he is a lawyer," returned Mr. Watts; "and so he might make her hear reason!"

Nina never liked to look back on the next few days. Everything went wrong. Judith enacted the part of a martyr. She and her mother were never weary of posing as deeply-injured creatures.

A great gloom settled on the house, and Nina

did not feel it in her heart to blame the little ones very much when they added a voluntary petition to their evening prayers that "Someone might soon ask Judy on another visit," but at the same time she saw little chance of its fulfilment.

Judith returned on the Monday. The following Thursday Mrs. Watts showed a great desire to get rid of her eldest daughter. Usually she objected to Nina going out, and spared her for even an hour from her household cares with reluctance. Now she bestowed a sixpence apiece on the younger children, and directed Nina to take them to the Christmas Bazaar and Fancy Fair then "on" at the Bon Marché, Brixton. In vain Nina suggested the distance, and the lowering aspect of the sky.

Mrs. Watts was set on it, and for very peace sake she had to be obeyed. Before three o'clock Nina and her little flock passed down Prettyman-road, and Mrs. Watts watched them out of sight with a sigh of relief.

"You had better not see him at first, Judith. It will be far simpler for me to talk to him. I can fetch you afterwards."

"And what am I to do?"

"You must answer the door, and not let anyone in to disturb us. The girl is so stupid. It's no use my telling her!"

"Well, we don't have many visitors," said Judith, a little bitterly. "I don't suppose any one will come."

"That creature might!"

"Who?"

"That girl I told you of whom Nina picked up, and who kindly stole my turquoise brooch."

"I should give her in charge if I were you. What low tastes Nina has!"

"We can't prove she took it," admitted Mrs. Watts. "If she should come just tell her that we know all about her now, and want to have nothing more to do with her."

"I shouldn't think she'd come. You see it must be over three weeks since she disappeared!"

Mrs. Watts shook her head.

"Something tells me we have not seen the last of her. Remember, Judy, if she does come she is not to be allowed to wait for Nina!"

"Of course not. Nina would be quite capable of giving her half her clothes. Where ever did she pick her up? What is she like?"

"She is lovely!"

Miss Judy shrugged her shoulders.

"Do you mean it?"

"She is so beautiful that she will never want for friends!"

"And a lady?"

"Yes!"

"Mother, why do you hate her so? Generally, you don't trouble much about strangers, one way or the other."

"You have chosen the right word, Judy. I do hate her!"

"But why?"

Mrs. Watts hesitated.

"If Lord Arden marries another woman, don't you think, Judy, you, in time to come, would hate that woman's child. This girl's mother was my bitter enemy."

"But I thought she was just a little waif whom Nina discovered by accident?"

"Nina thinks so. It is safe that she should not guess how closely the web of Nell Briarley's life is interwoven with our own. For my children's sakes—for yours most of all, Judy—I must break off all intercourse with that girl."

Judy looked perplexed.

"But what harm would she do us?"

"Hush!" whispered Mrs. Watts. "I hear a knock. If that is Lord Arden I will see him upstairs in my little sitting-room, and mind, Judy, you manage that I am not disturbed."

Mrs. Watts had written to Lord Arden urging him to call on her "respecting an urgent family matter." George Harding, to whom he showed her note, nodded his head sagaciously.

"Just so. Madame Kathleen has marked

you for her son-in-law. You did not yield to fair means; now, sir, she is going to try threats."

Lord Arden shook himself very much after the fashion of a Newfoundland dog.

"I have a great mind to refuse to go."

"You had far better see her. Poor woman, she is preparing a great disappointment for herself. She will bring out her best card—namely, that your uncle left a living child, whom she will seek out unless you marry her daughter; and fancy her sensations when you refuse her! You are quite aware of the Lady Fenella's existence, and are now assisting your lawyer to search for her."

"She must be an odious woman."

"According to my clerk, Mosello, the father and the eldest daughter are the best of that family. I always suspect the lad of a *tendresse* for Miss Watts himself. If he wins her I am afraid he will have a very trying mother-in-law."

"I wish you would go instead of me."

"It would be useless. Besides, the lady can't hurt you. You know the very worst she can tell you."

But for all that Noel shrank from the interview before him. He was peculiarly refined and sensitive; he was almost ultra particular in his views of womanhood, perhaps, because he had never associated with any ladies but such as were gentlewomen in thought and word. He knew that there was a class of people in which it was customary for a mother to bring young men to book by inquiring their intentions; but that he should ever suffer the indignity of such questioning was intensely repugnant to him.

He was a little graver and a little sadder than when he left Arden Court, for he was no nearer the object of his quest, and there were times when he believed firmly he and Nell should never meet again. Then he decided death had ended all her troubles, and that vision which had so affected him was, in reality, a token of her decease.

A very diminutive servant opened the door to him, and said Mrs. Watts was at home. The same damsel took him upstairs to a tiny room on the first floor. She ushered him in with great care, and left him *à la carte* with the lady for whose sake all Highshire said his uncle had led a lonely life.

Judith, listening with strained ears in the parlour below, heard the Earl mount the dark, dingy stairs, and wished she could have made a third at the interview.

Her mother declared Lady Nora alone was to blame for Noel's "desertion," and after a little talk with herself he would be only too eager to ask Judith the question she had been so long prepared to answer favourably; but Judy was hardly so hopeful as her mother. She sat and waited, and the suspense irritated her.

She stamped her little foot, and would have dearly loved to vent her anger on someone, however unoffending. And the opportunity was given her.

Noel had not been ten minutes in the house when Judith saw a slight figure come wearily up the front court—a girl in a black dress, plentifully covered with snow, for Nina's fears for the weather had been justified, and the white flakes were now falling thick and fast.

Judy had never seen Nell Briarley before. She had not the remotest suspicion that her sister's "adventures" was acquainted with Lord Arden, but the moment she set eyes on this black-robed girl she felt certain it was Nell, and certain, too, of another thing—that she hated her.

Truth to say, Judy never did like girls unless they were elderly or ugly. Nell was neither. Weary and delicate as she seemed—poor and shabby as was her clothing—yet Judith envied her, for she had a nameless grace—a quiet dignity—to which the second Miss Watts could not attain, try as she would.

She remembered her mother's instructions, and went to the door as soon as she heard the knock, looking with a cruel disdain upon the

rusty, black dress, which contrasted so forcibly with her own ruby velvet, for in honour of Lord Arden she was wearing one of her mother's presents.

It was a scene fit for a painter these two girls, as they met for the first time. Both were young, both were beautiful, but there all resemblance ceased. Nell looked like a fair, white lily broken by the wind, Judy resembled a dahlia—strong, robust, defiant.

"What do you want?"

It was not the words only, nor yet the tone in which they were uttered which made Nell's heart ache. It was the look Judith cast upon her—a look which said plainer than speech she thought a wide gulf lay between them.

"Can I see Miss Watts?"

"My sister is out."

This, then, was Judith. Nell remembered how she had heard this girl was to be Lord Arden's wife. She looked at her again with deeper interest. Well, her hero would have a beautiful bride, but would the man, who had been so tender, so compassionate and pitiful to a helpless stranger, be happy with such a scornful face at his side through life's journey? Judith was going to close the door. Nell saw it, and gathered her strength for another effort.

"When will Miss Watts be in?"

"This evening."

"Could I wait until she comes?" Oh! how wearily the girl spoke. "I have come a long way, and I am very tired."

"No!" said Judith, fiercely. "My mother told me not to let you in. She says we have found out all about you, and you are no fit associate for us!"

Nell waited for no more. She turned away, and trudged through the snow back to the gate. It was quite clear to her what they had heard. Mr. Palmer, disappointed at losing the clue, had come to Mrs. Watts with his story, and she had decreed the girl who had jilted him was not to be allowed to mix with her children. Perhaps she had justice and custom on her side—perhaps, in the eyes of right-minded people she (Nell) was a great sinner, but yet she could not change her course, come what might. She would keep her promise to her mother.

Poor little Nell! Things had gone very badly with her since she left Prettyman-road. She had not earned a sixpence, and the contents of her two boxes were fast disappearing till she wondered what would become of her when she had nothing left to sell for daily bread.

But, poor and troubled as she was, there had been no thought of asking help in her great desire to see Nina. It was only her heart ached so sadly, and Nina had been kind to her. It seemed to her the sound of Nina's voice, the clasp of her soft, loving arms must ease that dull, weary pain, and it was Christmas-tide—the first Christmas she had ever spent without her mother. She yearned for just one friendly word—just one caress from lips as true and innocent as her own. She did not much care what happened to her now. She did not pay much attention where she went. She was an outcast, or so it seemed to her, from all things good and pleasant. Homeless, hopeless, friendless, what did it matter what became of her?

She walked on and on because she could not bear to go back to the wretched room she called home. She wondered if Nina would be just a little sorry she had been driven away! She wondered whether pretty Mrs. Dane, amid the happiness of her first Christmas at Foxgrove, would cast a single thought towards the poor girl she had been kind to.

"If it wasn't for her," thought Nell, wistfully recalling the sweet face, "and dear Mrs. Wyndham, I should think there was no mercy in the world; but they were kind to me—they trusted me. How beautiful Judith looked! I suppose she has come home to prepare for her wedding. She will be his wife, and have the right to be always with him. Perhaps some day he will tell me about her."

Nell's meditation broke off there. The snow had come on so suddenly and fallen with such rapidity that the Common was quite covered with a thick white mantle. The lamps were just lighted, and gave a strange, weird aspect to the scene. Only when she stopped suddenly from sheer fatigue did Nell realize she had come miles out of her way. She was now in the middle of Clapham Common, where one part branches off towards Wandsworth. She had never been there before, and knew not where to turn.

She had left the pavement with its brilliant shops far behind her. She saw nothing but a wide track of white land, bordered here and there by private houses. She was living in a small street near Pimlico. How should she ever get back through this driving snow, and she had no money, not even twopenny for an omnibus fare! If she could once get back to the high road! She stood leaning against a lamp as she tried to think what to do, and its light fell full on her wan, tired face. Nell was so weary she could have sat down thankfully in the snow and cried herself to sleep, but it was not to be. Suddenly she heard the sound of wheels, and saw a cab approaching the house nearest her. She gathered courage as an old gentleman alighted. Surely he would tell her her nearest way! He had a shrewd, kindly face, and was much wrapped up in great coat and comforter.

"A bitter night!" he said to the driver. "Here's your fare—a shilling extra, as it's Christmas time!"

The cheery voice emboldened Nell; she stepped forward and said, feebly,—

"Please I have lost my way. Would you tell me the way to Victoria Station?"

He looked at her strangely, but not unkindly.

"You can never walk there to-night! Where do you live, my child?"

Nell felt comforted by the fatherly tone.

"Little Caroline-street. It is quite close to Victoria Station. I can soon walk there if you will tell me the way."

"You are not fit to drive there, much less walk. You look ready to drop. You had better come home to me, and let my sister see to you. I will get this good fellow," pointing to the cabman, "to telegraph to your friends, so that no one is alarmed."

Nell smiled wistfully.

"There is no one to be alarmed. I am quite alone in the world."

Was it the smile, or did some faint sound of unforgotten music in the voice recall a memory of bygone years? The old gentleman took the girl's hand in his.

"You had better come to my sister!"

"But I am a stranger."

"It is Christmas time"—he hesitated—"and you will remind her of one we both loved. Have you no mother, child, that you are wandering about like this?"

"No mother, and no home!" answered Nell, as she followed him up the carriage drive. "When you came I was wishing I could lay down in the snow and go to sleep."

"Poor child!"

A dear old lady with little silvery curls opened the door for them. She gave a scream of delight when she saw Nell.

"Where did you find her, George?"

Nell smiled wistfully.

"You do not know me!" she said, faintly. "I am a stranger, only—"

"I do not know your name, my dear," said Miss Susan, who was quicker in some things even than her brother, lawyer though he might be; "but I am sure of one thing, my poor child, you are Madge Disney's daughter!"

But that sudden mention of her mother's name was too much for Nell. With one bitter sob she fell senseless at the kind old lady's feet.

(To be continued.)



# WAKED BY A KISS.

—o—

WHEN a careless and light-hearted boy,  
On my pillow I slumbering lay,  
And dreamed o'er the moments of joy  
That were mine through the long golden  
day,  
Ah! how gladly my spirit would leap,  
In its glory of exquisite bliss,  
To be lovingly waked from my sleep  
By a mother's—a mother's fond kiss!

Now, the lord of a beautiful life,  
In my glorified dreams are renewed  
All the love-tinted scenes with my wife,  
In the days, long ago, when we wooed.  
Thrills of joy through my heart-pulses leap,  
In a moment of gladness like this,  
To be lovingly waked from my sleep,  
By my darling's—my darling's fond kiss!

When the world and its pleasures are o'er,  
That so long I have fondly caressed,  
And I pass, to return nevermore,  
Through the grave to the home of my rest,  
How my purified spirit will leap,  
In its glory of infinite bliss,  
To be lovingly waked from my sleep  
By an angel's—an angel's kind kiss!

G. B.

# DRIVEN TO WRONG.

—:—

## CHAPTER XXXIV.—(continued.)

CHRISTMAS DAY broke fine and clear, and the robin sang to Elsie as she looked out of her window, and decided to go to church, notwithstanding her unpleasant interview with the Rector the day before, and the red berries shone still among the crystallized branches.

Mrs. Charlton had many a warm greeting from the cottagers as she passed along the street, and many faces were brightened by the gifts she had showered around her among the poor of the parish.

She took her usual place in church, for she had long since retired from assisting at the organ, Marion being more than competent to carry out the small amount of music permitted by Mr. Hilhouse.

That worthy felt somewhat uncomfortable as his eyes met those of Mrs. Charlton, but he turned them in the direction of Rose D'Aray instead, and was satisfied, for the girl blushed, and was confused by his glance.

He had not seen her that morning, for she had not known how to meet him or to greet him, so she had remained in her own room, pleading a headache as an excuse for not appearing at breakfast.

Even Mr. Hilhouse could not dim the brightness of that brightest service of the year, and the voices of the congregation rose full and clear in the old building.

"Hark! the herald angels sing!"

And Elsie forgot the Rector and her vexations as she joined heart and soul in the glad hymn of praise.

Nell Hilhouse could not follow even in that; her mind was wandering from the ancient church at Market Glenton to the meetings in the pinewood, past and future, her young heart thrilling with love and anticipation.

Once she was startled into listening, when the Rector's voice rang out with his text, "Honour thy father and thy mother," and she felt deep down in her mind that the words were intended for her; likewise the warnings and condemnations which followed. But she only gave a hard and wilful smile, for Nell had already placed her father and her lover in the scale, and decided in favour of the latter.

So the service went on and was concluded. And when Mr. Hilhouse proceeded into the

vestry, Elsie slipped behind the hideous red moreen curtains which surrounded the organ, and stood by Marion's side, and there was a sudden break in the harmony, but Mrs. Charlton soon set things straight.

"Go on playing, Marion, darling!" she whispered. "I couldn't help coming; but I don't want to get you into a scrape, my poor girl! I'll slip away again when I have given you the season's blessing. I wish you much peace and joy, my dear Marion! May Heaven bless you!"

"Thank you! Thank you a thousand times!" answered the girl; "and thank you for coming. I wanted to see you so much!" she added, as her fingers stumbled over the keys. "Elsie, what must you think of me, after all your kindness, to leave you like that?"

"I think you are the best of girls, and worthy to be Cecil's sister. I can't say more than that."

"You can't, indeed. I wanted so to say good-bye, and now my wish is granted."

"Good-bye? Why, child, what do you mean?" asked Mrs. Charlton, looking at her anxiously.

"I will write and tell you my plans by-and-by, Elsie; there is no time now. Do not stay for Cecil's sake!"

And Marion's hands left the keys suddenly, and were clasped about the little widow's neck with a convulsive movement.

Then she whispered to her to go, and Elsie saw that great teardrops filled her eyes, and heard a deep sob rise in her throat; but the organ went on again, and she crept out from between the curtains with a full heart, wondering what fresh trouble had fallen upon her friend, and feeling certain that she was suffering acutely.

She soon learnt the news from the voluble lips of Mrs. King. She and the doctor were waiting for her in the churchyard.

"We have come to carry you off with us," said the doctor; "so don't say no."

"What will poor old Trusty think if I don't return home and give him his Christmas dinner?" laughed Mrs. Charlton. "He is such a friend that I really must."

"We will all walk round that way and fetch the varmint, and he shall come home and take pot-luck with us. The children will be delighted to have him; won't you, sprites?"

A shout of pleasure followed the proposal, and they all started off together towards the "Nest," but Elsie's thoughts were left behind, filled with the sad face of Marion Hilhouse.

"Doctor," she whispered, when she found herself by his side, "something is wrong with Marion, and I can't tell what it is. Won't you drop in and see her some time to-day?"

"Of course I will," he answered, readily; but Mrs. King had caught the meaning of Elsie's words too.

"No wonder, poor girl! Without doubt she has seen that flaming account of Mr. Gresham's marriage in the paper, and it has upset her. Such an affair! Poor Marion! she would feel it, for no one could fail to see how fond she was of him. He has treated her very badly. But, there, if he's a man of that sort she is better without him."

"Perhaps; but it is hard to believe, in the first hours of disappointment. I had not heard of it; but no doubt she has read it; Some kind friend would be sure to take care that she should see it, poor child!" she added, a little bitterly.

As for Marion, she had been shown the account of the wedding the night before by Miss Hilhouse, who came to the Rectory on purpose to make her read it, and had carried out her desire during her brother's interview with Samuel Biggs; watching the quivering face with ill-concealed satisfaction, that another had suffered, and was suffering more than it was in her own hard nature to do.

When Elsie left Marion, it was the last straw upon the camel's back, and her hands crept over the keys even more feebly, until

they slowly ceased altogether, and the girl fell forward senseless.

The Rector came out of the vestry, and wondering at the cessation of the music parted the curtains and looked within them. The blower pumped and pumped without producing a sound; then stole from his place in alarm, and also peeped under the curtain, and, seeing Marion's prostrate form, slunk quietly away to find Dr. King.

He met him as he came back down the street with his family, and Elsie and Trusty, and called him aside, and told him what he had witnessed; and Dr. King went off to the church without another word.

But Marion was not there. Mr. Hilhouse had had her carried to the Rectory, and there the doctor followed her.

Her faintness had then passed, and she smiled at him.

"Elsie sent you, I know," she whispered. "Am I not right?"

"Partly right, and partly wrong," he answered, letting his finger rest upon her pulse.

Then he produced a bottle from his pocket, and made her promise that she would take its contents.

When he left her, she thanked him, in a strange, wistful manner, for all his kindness to her, and she smiled in a far-off way, when he said he should run in and see her on the morrow.

As soon as the afternoon service was over, Mr. Hilhouse walked slowly up the village, so as to be at the appointed place at five o'clock as arranged.

Had the world not been so white, it might have been said to be already dark.

Mr. Hilhouse was more than punctual, but Samuel Biggs was already awaiting him. They did not walk together, at Samuel's suggestion, but he led the way; the Rector following him with a perturbed mind. When they reached the pine wood the guide halted.

"It is better they should think you've found it all out for yourself, sir," said he, "than that you should be in league with me, so I'll just show you where to find 'em, and retire at once."

The Rector nodded assent, and Biggs went on through the darkness under the trees where no snow had reached, then stopped once more, and pointed out one particular clump, where shone the faint ray of a lantern.

"That's them," he whispered, and, turning, left the Rector of Market Glenton, among the pine trees alone.

He paused for a minute, then advanced cautiously, taking a considerable circle, lest the lovers should hear his approach, until he absolutely faced them, though they had not an idea they were discovered. And by the aid of Laurence's little bull's-eye which hung upon a nail in a tree near at hand, which showed it was its accustomed place, Mr. Hilhouse saw that all Samuel Biggs had said to him was true. Nelly was looking up in Laurence's face, and he down upon hers, and they were most decidedly billing and cooing in a manner which thoroughly astonished, and even horrified the Rector.

He once more skirted the trees, and coming up behind them, listened to their love-talk as they sat in their nest of dried moss and fern leaves.

"Nell, darling," said the young man, lovingly. "You shall not be exposed to such harshness. Tell that old tartar of a father of yours that I won't have you harassed and worried, and that if he won't give his consent we will do without it; and so we will, my pet. What will do for one will go a very long way towards keeping two; and remember your home is ready, whenever you are willing to take possession of it."

"Oh! Laurence," returned the girl, clinging to him. "I should be so glad to come, for I am really miserable at the Rectory, now I have lost my mother."

"It's a shame of your father to be so hard on you, Nell. I would make him answer to

me for it if I could. He has behaved very cruelly to us both, but; never mind, sweet-heart, my love will never fail you, and we can both do without him. Can't we?"

"Indeed I can, Laurence. I don't think I have ever loved papa. He has ever been so tyrannical, and I am not good and gentle like mother, nor even like Marion. She has more real spirit than I have, but I have a hotter temper, and things try me beyond endurance. Mother altogether spoils my father; had she stuck up to him, and contradicted him right and left, he would have found his jivel better. As it is, he's unbearable, and makes me feel wicked."

"Honour thy father and mother," cried the stern voice of the Rector, and his words were followed by a startled scream from Nellie, who after one look at her father's angry face, as he stood denouncing before them, clung to her lover tenaciously, while he threw his arms around her, and fearlessly faced the intruder.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### A NIGHT IN THE PINE WOODS.

LAURENCE TRAVERS stood like a stag at bay, his nostrils dilated with defiance, ready to do battle for the girl he loved, who trembled while she clung to him.

"This is scarcely a fair intrusion, sir!" he cried, in a strong, clear voice. "You forbade me to meet my darling in your house, and I obeyed you. I have yet to learn that your authority extends to these woods. So kindly leave us to go on with the conversation which you have so ruthlessly interrupted."

"Mr. Travers," returned the Rector, with sternness. "I am surprised at you; I am shocked—absolutely shocked—at your disobedience and impertinence. How dare you lead my child out of the way? Such conduct will bring you no blessing, you may depend upon it, and you will not be without your punishment!"

"I do not consider I have done any wrong," retorted the young man, boldly. "All is fair in love and war! Had you permitted me to meet Nellie in her own home I should not have sought her elsewhere; but I am not going to give up the woman I love, and who reciprocates my affection, to please even her father. Nothing could make up to either of us for the loss of one another. You have nothing against me save my poverty, and if Nellie prefers to be poor by my side to rich away from me, why, it is surely for her to choose, and no one has the faintest right to interfere!"

"Ellen! come home!" said Mr. Hilhouse in a sepulchral tone of voice. "Come home," and he drew a step or two nearer to his daughter, who, with a muffled cry, ran to the farther side of her lover.

"Oh, Laurence," she whispered, "take me away. I always was afraid of papa!"

"All right, little one! Come along," he returned, in a low voice; "we shall give him the slip yet!" and catching the bull's-eye lantern from the tree where it hung, he clasped Nellie firmly by the arm; and, without a word of warning, they struck off into the darkness, the light from the little lamp dancing like some animated sprite of mischief, first here and then there, in the ebon darkness which surrounded them, and making the rest darker yet by its bright gleams.

For a minute Mr. Hilhouse stood still in surprise; the next, he realized his situation.

He knew nothing whatever of the wood, which extended for some two miles; and here he was in the very midst of it, with nothing whatever to guide him in finding his way out, save the mocking glimpses of light cast hither and thither by the receding bull's-eye; sometimes among the branches overhead, sometimes among the sand and dead leaves which strewed the ground, then to right and left like a wriggling serpent, so swift were its

glinting gleams, until at last even they ceased, and the Rector stood there in the dark alone.

He fully recognized the unpleasantness of his position, and after a moment of thought, he started off to follow the last glimpse of light, at a pace not at all calculated for a stranger, along those wood paths. The result was that he caught his foot in some gnarled and knotted roots, extending above the ground, and stretched his length upon the earth.

Had he not been the Rector of Market Glenton, it might have been supposed that the ejaculation which arose to his lips was not a canonical one; but with the full knowledge of his position among his fellowmen, we can but be certain that we must of necessity be mistaken, and have no doubt that Mr. Hilhouse was commending himself to heavenly keeping, or telling out his willingness to accept the lowly position now before him.

At any rate, he seemed in no hurry to arouse himself from it, although he was fully aware that the fugitives were distancing him; for, truth to tell, his ankle was badly sprained, and inaction seemed the only course open to him, for the faintest movement caused him pain.

So he lay still for a considerable space of time, then having dragged himself into a sitting position, he struck one of Rose D'Aroy's wax matches, and looked at his watch—half-past five!

His dinner would be ready at six, and he had a special service at seven. How was he to get back to either? If the way were clear he would be unable to walk; as it was, he had no idea how to get out of the woods in the dark.

He had trusted to his daughter to return home with him, and she had given him the slip; and it seemed to him that unless Samuel Biggs had had the sense to wait for him, or to return to fetch him, he had no choice but to spend the night where he was.

Another match told him that it was his dinner hour, and his inner man thoroughly corroborated the statement of his watch.

One by one Rose's vestas were all expended, and by their aid he groped his way to the cosy nest of moss and dry leaves which Laurence had built for Nell, and which was quite a godsend to him in his present position.

It was still and quiet under the trees, save for the rustle of the wind among the branches overhead, which swayed and shivered with a weird and awesome sound, far from agreeable to the saintly man, who began to experience unpleasant sensations of cold down the backbone; and, although he was, of course, the last man in the world to be afraid, still the Reverend James Hilhouse had never experienced such unusual sensations before.

Samuel Biggs certainly had no intention of playing tricks upon his Rector. His only reason for not wishing to be seen was that when he left the Rectory the night before, he made his way to Laurence Travers's lodgings, and offered his services to the young man as go-between to him and Nell with the Rector; and although he was far too proud to accept such aid, yet, nevertheless, he gave the hypocrite half-a-sovereign for coming to warn him that Mr. Hilhouse was trying to track out their place of rendezvous, which Biggs promised the Rector should never know from him, although it was likely enough someone else besides himself might be conversant of it. Samuel had not a doubt but that the Rector would take Nell home with him, and he was aware that every path in the wood was *terra cognita* to the girl and her lover.

So he sneaked away as quickly as possible, and having the night before laid in his stock of provisions for his Christmas dinner, including a bottle of whisky for his friend, who was once more afflicted with those terrible cramps and spasms, he hurried back to the town, and was quickly in his own room with the door locked, solacing himself for the

lack of those family ties for which he was excruciating the night before, with "nips" from the whisky bottle, during the operation of cooking; and, to judge by the savoury smells which emitted from cracks and keyhole to his fellow-lodgers, Sam was not having a bad time of it, although, afterwards, he feelingly remarked to his friends upon the lowly crust which had been his frugal fare on Christmas Day, and his contentment with what the Lord had provided for him.

Good, holy, contented Samuel Biggs!

Thus it was that Samuel never returned to the pine woods that night.

And when the dinner-bell sounded at the Rectory, Rose alone, of all the household, was there, in reply to its summons. She sat down by the drawing-room fire and waited, thinking over that problem of duty which had been set her by her guardian the day before, even as she had thought of it through many of the hours of the former night, and through many more during that Christmas Day. The Rector couldn't have chosen a better season for his request.

Like most others, Rose's heart was filled with kindly feelings, engendered by the required universal peace and goodwill. It seemed to her that all quarrels, vexations, and tiffs should be laid aside, and hands joined in unity of spirit in honour of this blessed season, and her own mind was filled with kind wishes towards all around her.

She was aware that there was not a comfortable feeling existing between Mr. Hilhouse and his daughters, and she sat pondering how she could help them all to be happy, and to be at one again.

If she consented to the Rector's wishes, would he not, to please her, make it up with them all? It was the first time she had definitely accepted the notion, and admitted to herself the possibility of becoming Mr. Hilhouse's wife. And it was followed by two flaming red cheeks, which she hid in her white hands, as she tried to put the idea from her mind; but it crept back little by little as she gazed into the fire, and sought to read her future in the burning caverns and bright, gassy jets of flame.

A sombre red light, then a strange and dazzling brightness, a flame of red, and blue, and yellow, and rush and hiss, and then the fire-page before her collapsed into sudden ruin, and she started up in fear.

It seemed as if some great happiness had broken in upon the even tenour of her life; and having, for a brief space, illumined it with a wild joy, all her fairy castle of happiness had broken up, and left her frightened and miserable.

So imaginative and fanciful was Rose D'Aroy, that she could make joys and troubles for herself out of the burning embers in the Rector's drawing-room fire-place. Then her mind came back to the present, and the question stood out before her in large letters.

Was she to accept Mr. Hilhouse's offer or not? Something in her innermost heart said "No!" It was the vital spark of her womanhood which spoke in that small voice, but she was too young and inexperienced to understand its meaning. On the other hand, her guardian had been kind to her, and he had told her that it would disappoint him if she refused his offer. Why should she vex or distress him? If it would make him happy and help him with his duties, why should she churlishly refuse him her assistance? It was not even as though she were obliged to consent to a speedy marriage. He had distinctly told her that it could not be at present, and that it was to be a secret between them. It was not much to promise, after all, just to let there be a confidential understanding that some day she and he should be married; but not yet—some day in the far-off future. Such a promise from her would make him feel happier and less lonely, and reconcile him to his loss—that was surely all he asked. And to her, what would it mean? No giving up anything, certainly. She cared for no one; not even



Cecil Hilhouse held sway over her maiden heart. It was all like the Christmas snow before the foot of man had trodden it, smooth and white and pure, even though in their silly, girlish talk, Nell and she had enshrined the Captain in the place of honour. Now Rose knew that he was not to reign there, and the knowledge gave her no real pain. If she accepted Mr. Hilhouse's offer she should be settled in life. She should have a home, a husband, and a definite place in society, and she thought she ought to be happy.

Like Aunt Mary Ann she had an idea that the position of the Rector's wife would be an agreeable one, and she reflected how she would endeavour to make herself beloved in the parish by high and low, rich and poor.

Mr. Hilhouse was certainly not at all what she had pictured her lover and husband to be, but she thought it would be wrong to turn from him for such fancies; and yet even as she told herself so, she shrank back from the remembrance of the caresses he had bestowed upon her the night before, and the clock struck a quarter past the hour from the tower of the old churob, and was quickly followed by that on the mantel-piece, and at the same instant the door opened, and the parlour-maid entered the room.

"Dinner has been ready this quarter of an hour, Miss Rose," said the girl. "Do you know where the Rector is?"

"I haven't seen him since the afternoon service," replied Miss D'Arcy, blushing as though her past thoughts were visible in her glowing cheeks. "No doubt he is in the study."

"No, miss, he is not; I opened the door."

"Then tell Miss Ellen."

"I cannot find her."

"How is Miss Marion now? If it won't disturb her you might ask her if she knows, or we shall all be late for church."

Jane looked mysterious.

"Miss Marion is not in her room, Miss Rose."

"Not in her room? Why she went to lie down soon after Dr. King left her, and she seemed very poorly."

"She was poorly, too, poor dear! I took her up a cup of tea at four o'clock, and she looked as white as a sheet, and her eyes were red with weeping; and no wonder, poor thing, for I have just found this on her table," and Jane handed the account of Mr. Gresham's wedding to Miss D'Arcy.

"Whoever let her see that? It's cruel, and that it is—for she worshipped the very ground he walked on, I do believe."

"Was she so very fond of him?" asked Rose, a strange tenderness creeping into her voice. "I don't think I should ever care for any one quite like that, do you?"

"I don't know, miss," returned the girl, critically, for she had had several sweethearts, and had experienced many wonderful sensations towards them all. "I don't know, miss. It's marvellous how fond we do get of the other sex sometimes; but there! that's only in confidence, miss, and I really do think Miss Marion must have gone back to Mrs. Charlton's, for she is not in her room, and I can't find her anywhere."

Rose went to look for her too, but nowhere was she to be found; nor did either Nellie or the Rector return home, and the church bell began its monotonous dong, dong, and the congregation assembled, and the bell rang on till half-past seven, when the rumour of the Rector's unexpected absence was announced by the churchwardens, and the people were dispersed, wondering—wondering very greatly, but none so much as poor little excitable Rose D'Arcy, who was growing seriously uneasy about Marion and Nell, and the man who had asked her to be his wife.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### NELL'S REBELLION.

MARION had, during her intimacy with Mr. Gresham, made the acquaintance of several

ritualistic clergymen; and Sisters of Mercy had been brought as nurses into the parish—all praise be to those devoted women who give up their time to doing good! And thus it came to pass that her intercourses with some of the Sisters had been kept up, and they had ever since been persuading her that she would be happier if she would enrol herself under their working banner, and become one of themselves. And Marion, her great heart aching for the love which could never now be hers, turned to the idea eagerly, and was only restrained from carrying it out by the knowledge that her father would highly disapprove of her association with any such institution.

But when she heard him speak as he had done on Christmas Eve, her indignation prompted her to leave home, and try to be useful in a new sphere of life. And the anguish consequent upon the news of Mr. Gresham's marriage settled the question.

So the following morning early, Christmas Day though it was, she telegraphed to the Mother Superior to expect her that night, feeling it impossible any longer to face her present existence without even Elsie Charlton for her friend.

Each room at the Rectory was, to her, haunted by a pale aristocratic face, a soft, tender voice; and a warm white hand seemed again and again in fancy to clasp her own.

All the streets in the old town were, to her, haunted too. She had walked down each one so often by *his side*, so very often, looking up into the refined face, listening to the flexible voice.

And having decided to try and shut the past back from her life, she was determined to do it at once, lest she should yet turn coward and shrink from giving up her old world.

All her days had been spent at Market Glenton, and it was a cruel wrench to her to leave it, and yet she felt she *must* go away, that the monotony of her present useless loveless existence was a burthen almost too heavy for her to bear.

Even Nell had Laurence always to think of now, and seemed to have small space for her in her mind.

It seemed her only chance to give herself up to real hard work. All the Sisters she had seen told her that they were happy, although their sweet sad faces spoke of having passed themselves through the furnace of affliction. Work was; Marion thought, the only panacea for her sorrow; and having at last so decided, she was feverishly anxious to carry out her idea, lest she should not have the courage to cut herself off from all her old ties and memories. She had spent an absolutely sleepless night after her final decision. Now that she really meant to go, everything around her seemed to grow so strangely dear to her.

Her mother's presence was still keenly felt, even though she had been three long months gone from among them, and Marion lingered in spirit in the hallowed spot now consecrated to her dear one. It was a great trial to her to leave it, and nearly overcame the crushed girl.

The last service in the old church, the last prayer, the last hymn of praise with the congregation, each of whom were known to her—her last touch of the fine mellow organ—it all seemed like going to her own funeral.

The "good-bye" of Elsie, the kindness of Dr. King, had been too much for her, and she had fairly broken down under the painful excitement, and Jane's representation concerning her had been perfectly true.

She had been bidding farewell to all the familiar objects in her bedroom, and her eyes were red with weeping, as the girl had stated.

After the cup of tea, Marion rose, and taking a leather bag from her wardrobe, she put in it a few necessities, and crept into Nell's room for a last look at her.

But Nell, as we know, had flown to meet her lover, and the absence of her outdoor garments proclaimed the fact to Marion. It was with mixed feelings that she realised that she must leave without a word to her sister.

She was afraid of Nell's sharp eyes and ready questions, for she had determined to let no one know of her flight until it was an accomplished fact. And she was afraid of herself, lest in that hour of parting she should give way, as she had done when Elsie had left her. She would let no one have the power to try and dissuade her from her purpose now she had at last made up her mind; but she was sorry not to kiss Nellie and clasp her hand before starting.

As to Rose D'Arcy, she seemed to know instinctively that she was to be her mother's successor, and resented the fact. She had surprised the Rector's look at the girl in church that very morning, and had understood her rosy confusion.

In truth, Marion was not over appreciative of her father's ward, and her winsome, half-childish ways towards him, and felt no regret at leaving her behind.

Two girls could scarcely have been less suited to each other than Marion and Rose. The former, firm of purpose, strong for good, gentle and uncomplaining, and utterly steadfast—the latter, fluttering like a light-winged butterfly from one sweet thing to another; full of fancies and sudden feelings, pretty, wilful, excitable and unstable, but a winning young creature for all that, and as full of mischief and fun as a gambolling kitten. Strong neither for good nor evil, but led by every passing thought, and by those with whom she came in contact.

Marion could make a friend of Elsie Charlton, but not of fluttering Rose; while upon the other hand, Rose suited Nell Hilhouse as a companion better than the widow, who had seen too much of the stern realities of life to care for the froth which gave excitement and amusement to the two thoughtless girls.

Marion did not disapprove of second marriages, and had her father in due time brought home some sensible woman of his own age as his wife, she would have made the best of it; but that he should *already* be on such terms with Rose D'Arcy as to bring those burning blushes to her cheeks, filled her with indignation, and made her rejoice that she was going away.

So, with her bag in her hand, she stole off into the churchyard and knelt by the grave of her beloved mother, bedewing it with her tears, her hand touching the grassy mound with reverence and love; then crept away as the dusk was coming on, arriving at the station in good time for her train.

The decorations at the old station of holly and coloured papers and the season's devices seemed meaningless to her, and she remained in the waiting room till the train came hissing up alongside the platform. Then she hurriedly took her seat, and slipping a shilling and a letter into the hand of the porter who came to close the door, she asked him to deliver her letter at the Rectory after the evening service, and he readily promised to do so, and kept his word.

About nine o'clock Jane brought it in on a salver, and showed it to Rose.

"Oh! miss, whatever can be the matter?" she cried. "A young man from the station has just brought this, and says as how Miss Marion left it with him when she went away by the five o'clock train this afternoon, with the order to deliver it here to-night. Dare you open it, Miss Rose? It's addressed to master, but I wouldn't let the porter go until I came to you to ask you about it."

Rose D'Arcy shook her head.

"No, I couldn't open it, Jane," she answered, decidedly.

"He'd never know if you did it over the kettle, miss," suggested the girl, with worldly wisdom.

"Oh, no! that would be worse; indeed, I couldn't. Place the letter upon Mr. Hilhouse's table, and light the lamp already for him; I am getting so dreadfully nervous. What can have become of him?"

"He's old enough to take care of himself," retorted Jane, somewhat pertly. "I'm think,

ing a good deal more about the young ladies; and cook is wild about the dinner—as lovely a turkey as you ever see, and done to a cinder. It does seem a shame. You might as well have something, Miss Rose?"

"I couldn't," she replied. "I feel all no-how, Jane!"

"Well, it can't be a pleasant sensation, miss, by the looks of you," answered Jane, with an attempt at a laugh, and went back to the porter, who chanced to be a very good-looking young man; and the girl not being suited with a sweetheart just then, showed her willingness plainly for him to accept the post, which he readily did—for the Rector's parlour-maid was a fine, dashing girl, as Mr. Gresham had noticed before he had been many hours in the house; and notwithstanding all the marvellous sensations Jane had already experienced towards former lovers, and the decided coldness of the night air, the girl stayed a long while in the Rectory garden with her new admirer, and no doubt they were both watching for the absent master of the house; albeit had he returned, the meeting would very quickly have broken up.

As it was, Mr. Hilhouse did not come back; and Rose sat crouching over the fire, nervous, faint, and excited.

Every creak of the furniture, every sway of the tree branches against the window panes, even the falling cinders made her start and tremble, and in the meantime the Rector was shivering with cold, and groaning with pain in Nell's nest in the midst of the dark pine trees; and if his feelings towards his daughter and her lover were not of the softest and most Christian character, who could blame him, realising what his position was?

The Rector tried to go over the evening service, tried to remember the usual family prayers, tried to say his own private ones, but signally failed in each and all.

Then he attempted to sleep, but the cold and the pain wouldn't let him. So he moaned and he groaned, and groaned and moaned by turns, starting at his own voice, and the still stranger voices of the night—the cold water down his back seeming to turn to icicles with the winter's frost, while Nell and her lover made their escape from the woods, gliding from one familiar path to another, with their dancing bull's-eye lantern throwing its rays upon the ground before them, without one thought as to how the Rector would get home, or of the accident which had so quickly overtaken him.

Neither Laurence Travers nor Nellie had had hearts, and had either of them entertained the faintest idea of the Rector's sad plight, they would themselves have returned to assist him, regardless of the lecture which would have awaited them; but they did not know, and went on their way in happy unconsciousness of what had occurred; the young fellow's arm about the girl's small waist.

"Look here, Nell, darling!" he said, lovingly, as he pressed her close to his side. "We will make an end of all this nonsense; I shall not let you go back to the Rectory any more. My mother will give you a warm welcome, and we will be married as soon as possible, little Nell, and then no one can part us."

"Oh! but Laurie, there is no one to marry us! Papa wouldn't, I'm sure."

"That is a difficulty, but I must overcome it. Nell I'll go into old Slowcombe's this very night, and ask for leave over three Sundays. Nobody ever refuses a Christmas Day request, and if he says yes, we will start off either to-night or to-morrow morning, and give your father the slip again, as we did in the pine woods just now, and we must be married before we return."

"That would be nice!" answered the girl, clinging to him; and they went back to the town, arm-in-arm, in a very happy frame of mind.

(To be continued.)

To him nothing is possible who is always dreaming of his past possibilities.

## LADY LILITH.

### CHAPTER XVIII.

HEATHCLIFF HALL showed to advantage, with its noble rooms, and grand oak panelling, after the poky little apartments at Seaview; and various alterations and improvements had been made during Lilith's absence, with a view to her special requirements.

Her husband had looked forward to pointing them out to her, and enjoying her pleasure at the sight of them; but this dream proved, like many others, a delusive one, for he had now no heart to care whether she was pleased or not. Even the bubble of their friendship had burst, and nothing was left but for each to pursue his or her separate path, independent of the other.

Since their meeting on the cliff they had hardly spoken to each other—hardly looked at each other, in fact. Lilith had not even found courage to thank her husband for the service he had rendered her. His distant manner had chilled her into a miserable silence, which each hour that passed rendered it more difficult to break.

On the morning after their return Lyndhurst drove over to his cottage, but he made no offer for his wife to accompany him, and after watching him start from behind the curtain, she went for a walk towards Crawley Wood.

Her wish had been to go to the Woodlows, and see if anything had been heard of Letty, but some instinct that partook of the nature of a fear withheld her. She could not analyse it—in fact, she made no attempt to do so, but resolutely drove away the vague terror that, ever since her visit to the Rosary, had taken possession of her.

As she was going up the narrow lane leading to the wood, she saw a man coming towards her, whom she fancied she recognized as Stephen Brooks. On seeing her he came to a pause, seemed to hesitate for a moment, and then turned up another path, also leading to the wood, and walked rather swiftly away.

If it was his intention to avoid her he failed in his object; for half-an-hour later they came face to face in the wood itself, and then she found she had been correct in her surmise, for the man was none other than Stephen Brooks, although so changed even since she saw him last that he almost defied recognition.

He had grown a beard—for the simple reason that he had been too careless of his appearance to shave himself—and it did not suit his face. His linen was soiled, and his heavy brows, overshadowing eyes, in which the fierce light of hatred and vengeance blazed, gave a certain hang-dog look to his expression, increased by the fact of his head being habitually sunk low on his chest.

Meeting thus, it was impossible for him to avoid greeting Lady Lilith, but he touched his hat with a sort of surlily unwillingness, and would have passed on if she had not detained him.

"Why do you wish to avoid me?" she asked, gently. "Have I done anything to offend you?"

He made no reply, but kept his eyes fixed on the ground.

"If I have it has been unwittingly," continued Lilith, in the same earnest tone. "I have been wishing to hear how your search has progressed?" She said this rather falteringly, as one not quite sure of her ground, "Have you learned anything of Letty yet?"

"We have not found out where she is, if that is what you mean."

"Nor heard from her?"

"No."

Lilith paused before going on with her questions; and Brooks, raising his eyes suddenly, and looking into hers with a deep, intense gaze, said, in a low voice,—

"Perhaps, my lady, you have learned her whereabouts?"

Lilith was so taken aback by the remark as to be utterly confused. Her eyes fell, her colour came and went, and all the time she was conscious of her companion's continued scrutiny.

"I!" she said, at last. "How do you suppose I am likely to gain any knowledge except through you or Mr. Reimayne?"

"He and I are neither of us in a position to give it you, but other people—people you have met—might betray something unawares, if you were sharp enough to take advantage of it."

There was veiled insolence in the speech, but this she did not notice. An awful shadow, whose vague form she had hitherto tried hard to ignore, was approaching nearer and nearer, and she trembled as she felt that the time had come when she must look it boldly in the face, and either recognize it as an actual fact or dismiss it for ever as an intangible fear, with no more foundation than her own fancy.

"What do you mean?" she asked, meeting his eyes as fearlessly as she could.

"I think your ladyship knows what I mean, and, if you don't, you had better not ask!"

"But I must—I will!" vehemently. "You shall not talk to me in enigmas, and then refuse to explain them. I insist on hearing your meaning!"

"And what if I decline to give it?"

"Then you are acting unfairly—you are taking a mean advantage of me, which no man has a right to take. You see I speak to you as woman to man—not as the wife of the owner of the soil on which we stand!"

She had taken the right way to reach him, either through natural tact, or an instinctive knowledge of his character. His expression changed.

"My lady," he said, "I have no wish to be rude to you, and it was for your own sake I was hesitating. It is hard for a wife to hear that her husband is a double-dyed hypocrite and a villain!"

Somehow, when she heard those horrible, haunting doubts put into actual shape, her whole soul rose up in revolt against them, and she vehemently refused to believe in their truth.

"It is a lie! You are mistaken! My husband is not a villain! Someone has deceived you!" she cried, breathlessly, incoherently.

Brooks shook his head, sadly.

"My lady, I wish it were so, but facts are too strong for me. Remember, I was not going to tell you this—you have brought it on yourself."

"And I do not regret it. If you are labouring under a delusion, it is best that you should express it, in order that it may be dispelled."

"There is little chance of that. I tell you, I am as convinced that Mr. Colin Lyndhurst was the man who took Letty away, as that I stand here at this moment."

Lilith turned away to hide the awful pallor which had overspread her face. It seemed almost as if an icy hand had closed round her heart—the sense of constriction was so great.

"Tell me your reasons for this belief?" she said, briefly, and Brooks was moved to admiration by the heroism with which she controlled herself.

"In the first place, Mr. Lyndhurst was seen talking to her one day just outside this very wood"—his hearer remembered the day perfectly—"then he came to the farm one afternoon when he knew that her father was out, and stayed there alone with her for quite half-an-hour, and she has been seen on several occasions in this wood, in conversation with a man who, I have no doubt, must have been Mr. Lyndhurst. But the strongest point is this—she travelled up to London with him!"

"Impossible!" came from Lilith's white lips.

"But it is true, and I can prove it. You will recollect that your husband left Heathcliff Hall on the morning of her disappearance?"

She made a hasty sign of acquiescence.



"And he went to London?"  
 "I believe so."  
 "Do you know what took him there?"  
 "Business, I suppose—business connected with financial matters."  
 "Did he tell you this?"  
 "He did not tell me in so many words, but I surmised it."  
 "Then I presume he started suddenly?"  
 "Quite suddenly. I knew nothing of his intention before the morning of his departure."  
 Brooks nodded, as if her answers confirmed his idea.

"And where did Mr. Lyndhurst stay while he was away?"

"At an hotel—the Langham, I believe."

"But he has a house in town?"

"Yes"—unwillingly.

"Why did he not go there?"

"Because he did not think it worth while during the few days he intended being absent."

"As a matter of fact he was absent more than a few days, was he not?"

"Yes, over a week, I think."

"And it never struck you as strange that, having a house of his own, he should prefer going to an hotel?"

Lilith made no reply. As a fact, it had struck her as strange, for the trouble to the housekeeper of preparing a couple of rooms for her master would have been infinitesimal. She remembered she had suggested accompanying Colin to London, and that the suggestion had appeared to embarrass him. It was in answer to it that he had announced his intention of staying at the Langham.

His manner had certainly appeared singular, and tended to confirm what Stephen Brooks alleged, but this she would not admit.

"There seemed to me reason in what he said," she replied, steadily. "Besides, if I remember rightly, you told me that you believed Letty had not got in the train at Heathcliff station."

"Nor did she, but we have found out that she walked to W—and entered it there. Of course that was to prevent arousing suspicion at Heathcliff, where everybody knew her."

"And you are sure she got into the same train as Mr. Lyndhurst?"

"The same train, but not the same compartment. You observe they took pains not to be seen together."

"In that case, it is—according to your own showing—strange that they should have travelled together at all," said Lilith, eagerly seizing the first excuse that occurred to her.

"Not at all. Letty had never been in London in her life, and would have been quite helpless if left to herself. It was necessary that she should have someone to look after her as soon as she got there, and such a task could not be performed by anyone but the man who was the author of her ruin."

It was impossible to contradict his reasoning. Evidently he had thought the matter out, and had not condemned Lyndhurst without due deliberation.

Poor Lilith could think of no argument with which to meet him, and during the interval that ensued a number of incidents flashed across her memory. She remembered especially the morning when Colin had refused to take her with him to Endacott, and she had seen Letty Redmayne and her lover in the wood, and afterwards met Letty and Lyndhurst outside it.

Then there was the afternoon when he had made an excuse for not accompanying her to W—and had gone to the Woodlows instead, and it was about this time that he had received the letters which had excited her curiosity, because he had been so reticent concerning them. An inspiration seized her.

"Have you any of Letty Redmayne's writing about you?" she said, and Stephen immediately produced from his pocket-book a small bundle of letters, which, from their worn appearance and frayed edges, seemed to be habitually carried about with him.

Lilith examined the writing on one of the envelopes. It was in the slanting, Italian

hand, peculiar to most girls who have been educated at a low class, but pretentious boarding-school. Lilith did not absolutely recognize it as the same she had seen on the address to her husband, but it seemed to her so much the same style that she thought it was very probably identical with it.

"Well!" said Brooks, who had been watching her, and had no doubt she must have some motive for her request.

"The sight of the writing has not helped me," she said, despondingly, and then her thoughts flew to the little cottage at Bourne-town, the photographs, the sketches—and, worst of all, the label she had seen on her husband's bag, before their visit to Seaview, and his reluctant confession that he had been at Bourne-town during his last absence from Heathcliff.

Was it, indeed, true that Letty Redmayne was the inmate of the Rosary? If so, her persistent efforts to keep herself secluded, and her hasty exit from the room when Lilith and Marcella sought shelter in the cottage, were fully explained.

Lilith's reverie was broken in upon by Brooks, whose eyes had never left her face.

"I am sure, Lady Lilith, that you are convinced of the truth of what I say, and also that you know even more than I have been able to tell you. Will you deny it?"

"I shall neither deny nor admit anything, Mr. Brooks. If it were indeed true that my husband were guilty, it would not be my place to accuse him."

"And yet, my lady, people say that there is no love lost between you and him!"

The haughty blood flushed her brow. She turned upon him with her own imperial pride, and even his steadfast eyes fell before hers.

"That is a question with which you have nothing to do, Mr. Stephen Brooks, and which you had no right to put. You are presuming on my forbearance to be insolent, sir!"

"I had no such intention, my lady," he returned, with as near an approach to humility as was possible to his independent nature.

"Indeed, all along, I have pitied you almost as much as myself, because I knew that you, too, must suffer. And you have shown yourself very good to James Redmayne, and to me in our trouble. We are neither of us ungrateful, and it was for that reason I would have refrained from telling you this if it had been possible. But I knew you must learn it first or last, and perhaps it is best you should hear it now instead of later on, when—" He pulled himself up abruptly, and the same dark look of fierceness came in his eyes as had been there when Lilith accosted him.

"What steps do you intend taking?" she asked, rather faintly, for his expression frightened her, and she rapidly decided that she had better lead him on to tell her his plans, in case they boded evil to her husband—as she feared they must.

He broke into a loud, harsh laugh, and came a pace nearer—so near that his hot breath fell on her cheeks, and she involuntarily drew back.

"What steps shall I take? Why, I shall revenge poor Letty, and myself—I shall—No, no—I mustn't tell you what I shall do. But I shall not sit down and tamely submit to be robbed of the girl I loved—of that you may be quite sure."

"Vengeance will not bring her back to you."

"Nothing will bring her back!" he cried, fiercely. "If she were to stand before me this instant she would not be brought back—not the pure, pretty, innocent Letty whom I loved! It would be another Letty—a girl whose white soul was stained, whose innocence and purity were gone like last year's snow—whose eyes would droop with shame before mine. Nothing can bring her back—nothing!"

Thick sobs interrupted his voice, and, disgusted with himself for this betrayal of emotion, he turned round hastily, and ran, rather than walked, in the direction of Woodlows.

Lilith made no attempt to call him back;

she was, in effect, glad to be alone. She was a brave woman; but his looks, far more than his words, had frightened her, and she was sufficiently acquainted with his character to believe that no considerations for his own safety would restrain him from the revenge he contemplated.

As she went, with slow footsteps, homewards, she wondered if any other woman had ever had so hard a lot as hers. And yet, in the midst of all the horror and shame she experienced towards her husband—for it now seemed impossible not to believe him guilty—she was ready to admit that she could not cast the first stone at him, for she herself was partly answerable for the crime of which he was accused.

He had loved her when he married her, and she had thrown back his love with scorn. What right had she, then, to expect the faith and affection he had vowed at the altar to bestow upon her? Her own defection was sufficient excuse for his, so far as she was concerned, although it did not render the sin of Letty's betrayal any the less.

No. Shocked, pained as she might be, it was not her place to be Colin's accuser, and she resolved to preserve a complete silence on the subject, unless circumstances occurred which might render it necessary for her to speak.

And in bitter humiliation the wife, who was no wife, returned home.

## CHAPTER XIX.

FOR the next few days Lilith lived in a state of such mingled excitement, apprehension, remorse and physical prostration as made life a burden to her. Her manner towards her husband was unaltered, but, to his surprise, whenever he went out she requested permission to accompany him, and, what was still more remarkable, refused to accept a negative answer, even when he clearly showed his disinclination to her company.

Not that when they were together she evinced the least desire to talk; as a rule she was silent, and, as he could not fail to see, nervous. She started at the least unusual sound, while her eyes roved restlessly hither and thither, as if she were keeping a constant watch, and wished to surprise some threatened danger.

One evening, as she was coming through the shrubbery leading to the Hall, she heard a slight rustling amongst the bushes—so slight, however, that it would have escaped any ears less strained than her own. Without a moment's hesitation she plunged in amongst the shrubs, and caught hold of the arm of a man, who was doing his best to escape.

"What is your business here?" she demanded, as she recognized Brooks, her bold tones forming a striking contrast to her trembling heart.

He looked at her sullenly, and did not at once answer. When he did, it was by an evasion.

"I suppose anyone who has business at the Hall has a right to walk up the shrubbery if he likes?" he said.

"Yes; but I do not believe that you had any intention of going to the Hall. If your purpose had been innocent you would not have tried to hide yourself directly you saw me."

"All right, my lady. You must think what you like. Whatever you think won't make much difference to me," he said, nonchalantly.

"There you are wrong," replied Lilith, determined to treat the matter with a high hand. "I could give you in charge for loitering about here for an improper purpose."

He seemed surprised at her tone, but presently broke into a contemptuous laugh.

"So you could, but I don't know how you would prove the charge. It would be your word against mine."

"And I think mine would stand the better chance of being credited," she said, still in

the same quiet, restrained voice. "At all events, it would be unpleasant for you, seeing that your person would be searched—especially unpleasant if you chance to have anything compromising concealed about you!"

This bold shot told. Even in the dusk she could see his face change, and she pursued her advantage.

"There is nothing to prevent my doing it, save a desire to act in a friendly manner towards you, if your conduct will allow me to do so. I do not believe in your excuse for being here. Will you tell me the truth?"

"Well, then, if you will have it, I was here because I wanted to see Mr. Lyndhurst, and I saw him enter the Lodge a few minutes ago."

"You wanted to waylay him on his way back?"

"To speak to him, my lady, that's all."

"In that case, why don't you go up to the house in a manly and straightforward manner, and ask to see him?"

"Because I don't wish the servants to see me. Don't you know, my lady"—he dropped his voice to a whisper—"that it is the desire both of James Redmayne and myself to keep this business of Letty's as quiet as possible? We have given out that she is on a visit to some relations, so that if she does come back her good name may be saved; and you may be sure that if I were to go up to the Hall, and ask for Mr. Lyndhurst, the servants' tongues would be wagging immediately, and the gossip would be all over the neighbourhood in no time."

This was very feasible, and yet Lilith did not believe it. Experience had told her that Stephen Brooks was a clever man in his way, with a glib tongue, ready for any emergency. She felt sure he was deceiving her.

"What you say may be the truth, but I do not believe it," she said, firmly. "My idea is that you came here with the intention of doing my husband some bodily harm—"

"And what if I did?" he interposed, savagely. "You ought not to be the one to prevent me, for he has injured you as much as me. You do not seem the sort of woman who, when your right cheek is hit, will hold out the left to be served in the same way, and yet that is what you are doing."

"That is not the point—has nothing to do with the question. Now, attend to what I say, Mr. Brooks, and believe that, although I am a woman, I mean every sentence I am about to utter, and am quite strong enough to carry my threat into execution. Unless you give me your word of honour that you will refrain from doing my husband any injury, I will call for help, and have you arrested this moment."

His reply was somewhat startling.

"You are a brave woman, and I admire you for it. You are a good one too, or I am no judge of womenkind, but you are liable to make mistakes, and there's a side of the question that you have not looked at. Suppose you do give me in charge, and suppose I, seeing that everything must come out, openly accuse your husband of beguiling Letty Redmayne away. What then?"

What indeed! Lilith absolutely writhed as she thought of the stir and commotion such an accusation would make. It would be a nine days' wonder—her name, and her husband's, coupled with that of the farmer's misguided daughter would be in everybody's mouth, and the gossip and scandal would assuredly find its way into the society papers. All the friends of her girlhood would pity her, or blame her, as the case might be.

To a woman of Lilith's proud nature, such an exposure could be nothing less than maddening. She could not even contemplate it without a shiver of repulsion.

"I think after all, it will be wisest of you to let me go," went on Brooks, with a sneer. "Its best to let sleeping dogs lie, my lady, and just as well not to stir stagnant puddles."

And then, with a swift movement, he wrenched himself free from her detaining clasp, and at once disappeared in the thicket of the shrub—

but in an opposite direction to the path leading from the Lodge to the Hall.

It was at that precise juncture that Lyndhurst himself appeared on the scene, and caught Lilith sharply by the arm, turning her face to what little light remained so as to see who she was—for it was now almost dusk.

"You!" he exclaimed, in astonishment, as he recognized her. Then he looked suspiciously round. "Was not someone with you—I thought I heard voices."

"Two of the gardeners, probably, on the other side of the path," she responded, evasively, for she dared not tell him who her companion had been, for fear he should ask questions which she could not answer. He did not press the point, but relinquished her arm, with an unconscious sigh, and went on to the house, she following. He was not only sure that he had heard voices from the spot where she was standing, but he was also of opinion that he had seen a man disappear a moment before he spoke to her, and he at once came to the conclusion that it could have been none other than Sir Horace Dalton, who had followed Lilith down here, and to whom she had given another assignation.

"She must indeed be infatuated with him, if her love will forgive his cowardice on the cliff the other day," Colin said to himself, but he addressed to her no word either of anger or reproach. It seemed to him that the situation was growing too serious to be disposed of in that manner: he must think it over, and then decide what had better be done, for it was quite impossible that things could go on in this way much longer. Both for her sake and his own, this terrible dragging out of a wearisome chain, from day to day, must be put an end to.

He did not see her again that evening which he spent in his study, and she in her boudoir, and it would be hard to say which was the more miserable of the two.

Half distracted with doubts, Lilith paced backwards and forwards like some wild animal in its cage. If she had only had a friend in whom she could trust, she would have applied to her for advice, but she knew of no one, except Lady Lester—and Lady Lester was the last person in the world on whose discretion reliance could be placed.

At one moment it seemed to her that it would be best to go straight to Lyndhurst, tell him she knew everything, and also warn him that she feared Brooks intended doing him some physical hurt, but at the thought, every nerve in her body quivered with repulsion. She could not accuse him of his crime—she, who if she had only fulfilled her own marriage vows, would never have driven him to break his!

At last an idea occurred to her, and she welcomed it with eagerness. She would go and see James Redmayne, hear what he had to say, and persuade him to use his influence in softening Stephen Brooks's resentment.

Once the idea occurred to her of telling him what she knew concerning the cottage near Bourne-town, but she decided that such a revelation would only be an added proof of her husband's guilt, and would consequently inflame Stephen's anger to fiercer heat than its present one. No, she must keep silent and let events work their own ends. She must wait with what patience she might, for only time could unravel the Gordian knot in which her destiny had become entangled.

Even though it was cold winter weather the door at Woodlows stood open, for the only female domestic of which the farmhouse boasted was a middle-aged woman, who was deaf and dumb—regularities that were not conducive to a satisfactory performance of the functions of answering and announcing visitors on the part of their owner.

Accordingly, Lady Lilith had to announce herself. She stood on the door-step for a few minutes, while the old eight-day clock ticked busily away inside, and the half-blind old spaniel lying on the mat blinked his one eye

and wagged his mutilated tail, too lazy either to bark or to get up and welcome the visitor.

Finding her knock unanswered, she went into the parlour, which now bore the grim, painfully neat aspect of a room that is never used, and then boldly proceeded through a door at the other end, which took her into the kitchen.

Here, lying on an old, shabby, chintz-covered couch, drawn up near the fire, and with a churchwarden pipe in his hand,—he had forgotten to smoke it for so long that the tobacco was a mere heap of grey ash,—was James Redmayne—older, paler, more thoroughly broken than he had been when Lilith last saw him.

"You are ill, I fear," she said, coming to his side, and looking at him anxiously. "If I had known it I would have come to see you before."

"I have had a slight stroke of paralysis, my lady, and I can't walk. For the rest I am as well as I ever shall be again."

He invited her to a seat, which she took; and then, after a few more inquiries concerning his health, she proceeded to the object of her visit.

"Mr. Brooks has told me he thinks it was my husband who has behaved so wickedly to your poor daughter," she said, with a certain simple directness characteristic of her—in certain moods. "I need not say how more than painful it is for me to hear such an accusation—"

"My lady," cried the old man, interrupting her in a voice of quivering eagerness, "to believe such a thing is almost as painful to me as it could be to you. I have known Mr. Colin from boyhood. I have loved, I have trusted him. To me he has always seemed the very soul of honour, a man to be relied on if every one else failed!"

"And now"—Lilith did not know how her lips quivered with excitement as she leaned forward to hear his opinion—"and now you believe him innocent?"

The farmer shook his head.

"I cannot, my lady. Facts are too much for me."

Lilith's head sank despairingly on her bosom. Two heavy tears fell into her lap. Her heart had leaped high with hope at the first part of Redmayne's tribute to Colin's worth, and the disappointment was proportionately bitter.

"Still," she said, after a pause, "even if your opinion has thus changed, you are not so blinded by passion as to desire"—her voice fell to a whisper—"his life!"

The old man started, and glanced apprehensively around.

"Why do you ask such a question, Lady Lilith Lyndhurst?"

"Because I believe his life to be in danger," she responded, emphatically. "And from the hands of him who was to have been your son-in-law—Stephen Brooks!"

Redmayne groaned, but though a shock, her words did not seem to be actually a surprise. It struck Lilith that the idea had become familiarised to him.

"Remember," Lilith went on, impressively, "such a vengeance as that would recoil with equal force upon its perpetrator. The law says 'a life for a life,' and Stephen Brooks would not escape the penalty of his crime."

Then, with impassioned pleading, she urged her request—that he would persuade Stephen to forego his plans of vengeance.

This he immediately promised to do, but added that he was afraid his advice would have no effect on the young engineer, maddened as he was by passion.

"I am an old man, my lady," continued the farmer, with a certain pathos in the homely voice. "and I read my Bible, and believe in what it says—Vengeance is mine, and I will repay. That is what the Bible teaches, and that is what I have told Stephen, but it is no good. He has bought a pistol, and he is bent on following his own way; and many a time, when I've been



lying here, I've trembled for the consequences. I was very rejoiced that Mr. Colin was away from home all last week, and if I could have walked I should have gone to see him myself, and begged him to repent of his sin, and give my poor girl back to me. Not all the vengeance that it is possible to wreak on him will undo what is done!"

Lilith thought for a few minutes, then asked him to write and tell her whether Brooks had yielded to his prayers; but with a pathetic glance at his paralyzed hand, Redmayne told her that it was an impossibility, for his affliction prevented his being able to handle the pen.

"Then I will come and see you again in the morning, and hear what you have to say," said Lilith; "and if there should be danger to my husband in the meantime, you must contrive some means of letting me know." She considered again, and a reminiscence of King Charles came to her, bringing with it an idea. "Send me a peacock's feather—I shall know what you mean."

"Very well, my lady. I will do so on one condition."

"And that?"

"That you do not betray Stephen, even to Mr. Colin, unless there is no other way of saving him."

The condition might prove a hard one; but Lilith had no alternative, so she accepted it, and gave Redmayne her promise to that effect.

## CHAPTER XX.

HUSBAND and wife stood face to face—only a few inches apart, and yet separated by a gulf as fathomless as the ocean.

"I have requested this interview with you," Colin said, slowly and distinctly, "because it seems to me we cannot go on as we are going on at present. Our lives are miserable; and unfortunately, so far as I can see, there is no chance of the evil being remedied. I wish to consider you in every possible way, and I have given the matter my most careful attention. Do you not think we had better agree to separate?"

She was standing opposite him—on the other side of the writing-table in the study, so pale that it was hardly possible for her to grow paler; but at his words there came a little catch in her breath, and her left hand was involuntarily pressed against her heart. Lyndhurst did not notice this movement, for his eyes were fixed on the ground.

"Do you mean a legal separation?"

"Either a legal or private one. A divorce is impossible, or that might be better."

Lilith could not understand the cold, cold pain that lay on her heart, and that, but for her pride, must have made itself audible in a cry of anguish. She saw his motive clearly. He wanted to be rid of her, so as to be able to return to his latest love, Letty.

It seemed to Lilith that, for the first time in her life, she knew what *hatred* meant. She hated Letty as she had never supposed it possible she could hate anyone!

"I know," he went on, still in the same level tones, "that you dislike scandal, and so I have done my best to avoid it, and will continue to do so. A little time ago, while our compact of friendship lasted, I thought that we might live together in comparative happiness, in spite of our mistaken marriage; but since then events have happened which have rendered that impossible!" This was indeed true, for it was since then that Letty Redmayne had eloped.

Lilith could not forbear a glance of mingled scorn and indignation, but her husband did not seem to notice it.

"It, therefore, appears to me that it will be best for us both to leave England. I shall travel about Europe, and you might pay a visit to your father in India."

She was completely surprised at the proposal—too surprised, indeed, to say a word; he added,—

"If you prefer it, I will accompany you to Aden, and there, no doubt, Lord Ansthorpe will meet you. We can easily say that your health obliged you to try a change of climate, and it will not be necessary to take even your father into your confidence unless you wish it. For my own part, I should strongly advise you to do so, but that is a thing apart, and you will, of course, exercise your own discretion. What do you say to my project?"

"I cannot say anything now. I must think it over, and then I will tell you my decision," she said, in accents that trembled in spite of herself; and with that she left the room, full of outraged humiliation at this action of her husband's.

And yet, as he said, it was better they should be separated, for it would be an utter impossibility to continue leading such a life as that had during the last week or two; and, indeed, Lilith had no doubt that whether she acquiesced or not Lyndhurst would still insist on his plan being carried into operation, for it was clear that even the slender tie between them was too irksome for him to bear.

She felt convinced that this proposal was not simply the result of their peculiar relationship, but the deliberate outcome of a resolve long since made, and which Colin had only waited for a favourable opportunity to put into execution. He was—very naturally—tired of the wife who had married him to save her own pride; and the duties he owed her he supposed to be nil. Besides, he was in love with another woman—a woman whom proud Lilith would not, even to herself, acknowledge as a rival—and his former affection for the Earl's daughter had died a natural death—as love will die when it is scorned, like his had been.

As she was crossing the hall, from the study, the butler met her, looking rather curious, and wholly disgusted at something he held in his hand.

"A boy brought it, my lady—one of the farm labourer's sons, I think—and begged it might be given to your ladyship—though I told him it must be some mistake, and I really did not like to bother you about it, my lady."

The object of the butler's scorn was a peacock's feather—dragged, dirty, as it had been picked up out of the farmyard, and which he exhibited in a tentative manner, as if fearing his mistress's anger. To his surprise she took it eagerly, and her face blanched as she looked at it.

"Where is the boy that brought it?"

"Gone, my lady. As soon as he had given it me he ran off like an arrow."

The butler withdrew, and Lilith stood quite still, gazing intently at the sinister message, whose meaning she of course divined.

Brooks must have said something to the old farmer, leading him to suppose that on this night his vengeance would be consummated!

Obedying her first impulse, Lilith quietly let herself out of the front door, and passed into the grounds—which were quite dark, for it was now about half-past eight o'clock, and there was neither moon nor star visible. She swept a hasty glance round, but could see nothing save the dim outline of trees and shrubs, and the distant lights of the Lodge, gleaming warm and ruddy, through the crimson curtains.

It was a curiously still evening; not a breath of wind stirred, not a leaf moved. The air was soft and warm and moist—so warm as to be unreasonable at this time of the year, with Christmas close at hand.

Still walking very quietly, Lilith made her way to the side of the house, where her husband's study was situated, and there she came to a standstill, for she fancied she saw something moving in a clump of laurels, just opposite the study window.

Nothing, however, was visible when she went boldly forward, and peered in amongst the wet foliage; but for all that she felt quite convinced that her senses had not deceived her, and that Brooks had really been concealed there, gazing in through the window at Lynd-

hurst where he sat, lost in thought at the writing-table.

Lilith's heart stood still, and then began to beat with suffocating rapidity, as she saw how easy it would be for anyone standing outside to take aim at the unconscious man, and then make his escape before even his crime was discovered.

The study window was a French one, opening on to the gravelled walk, and one side of it was thrown wide open, as if the occupant of the room, finding it too hot, had tried to get a little air. One of Lyndhurst's peculiarities was a habit of never having the blinds drawn when he chanced to be alone, and perhaps the reason of this lay in the fact that he often relieved the tedium of his solitude by walking through the window, and smoking a cigar on the terrace outside.

There was no gas in the study, but a shaded lamp stood on the writing-table, and Lyndhurst was sitting within its radius, his elbows on the table, and his face buried in his hands.

Lilith was lost in perplexity. Mindful of her promise, she dared not have a search made in the grounds for fear of implicating Stephen. Neither dared she go straight to Colin and tell him of his danger, since such a warning would necessitate telling him that she was aware of his connection with Letty—and if she said so much it would follow that she should go farther, and express her hatred and indignation at the wrong he had inflicted on the poor girl.

No, the only thing was either to stay out there and keep watch, or go inside, and induce him to close the window, and have the shutters fastened, in which case Stephen Brooks would go away, his plan of revenge frustrated—at least for one night.

She decided on the former plan, for to suggest to Colin that he should close the shutters would be sufficient to arouse his curiosity, and the other alternative would, in effect, be equally safe; for Stephen, if he saw her there, would never approach near enough to the house to take aim, supposing he had a pistol, or to rush in, and inflict other punishment on Lyndhurst, if he intended a hand-to-hand encounter.

Of fear on her own account, Lilith was unconscious, and even if the man she was keeping at bay had been far more desperate than Stephen, she would still have kept her vigil, and even taken a sort of miserable pleasure in it, as a penance for the wrong she had done Lyndhurst—a wrong for which she now knew it was impossible to atone.

She took up her position just outside the window, her face turned towards the grounds; and there she stood, while the stable clock chimed out its quarters and a gradual silence fell over the old Hall, telling that the servants had retired.

Presently, she grew cold, for though the night was warm for the time of year, it was, nevertheless, winter; and Lilith, it must be remembered, wore only a thin evening dress, which was lamentably insufficient for outdoor covering. But she dared not leave her post to get a shawl or mantle, for the few minutes of her absence might give Brooks the opportunity he was waiting for, and prove fatal to her husband.

She turned up the overskirt of her dress, and drew it over her head and shoulders; slight as the texture was it was better than nothing at all.

As the night wore on she grew nervous, the strain of this suspense began to tell on her. There was something weird in the position—she standing there, between her husband and the death with which he was threatened.

Every now and again the rustling of a bough, or the cracking of a twig, warned her that Brooks was still in the vicinity—watching, with the dogged patience of a beast of prey, for his victim; and while she kept her vigil she was able to look back, and trace out all the events that had had their birth in the moment of outraged pride when she had promised to become Lyndhurst's wife.



["WHAT IS YOUR BUSINESS HERE?" LADY LILITH ASKED IN BOLD TONES, BUT WITH TREMBLING HEART.]

Yes. She saw that no man, no woman, has a right to say his life belongs solely to himself, and that he is willing to take the consequences of his actions, for such consequences must, of necessity, include other people in their reach, just as a stone thrown into a pool of water creates circle after circle, each widening in its turn.

Our slightest words, our most trivial deeds, have their effect on others as well as ourselves, and act and react with an effect which would startle us if we could but know it. Man owes a duty to others as well as to himself, and that duty can be but ill performed if he thinks only of the indulgence of his own pride or pleasure.

Poor Lilith! She was beginning to taste the full bitterness of the cup she had prepared for herself, in ignorance as much as in the vehement passion of anger and pride. The fires of tribulation were already scorching her heart—would they harden it, or prove, indeed, the cleansing fires which were needed to purify and perfect her character?

Twelve o'clock struck with a deep, reverberating echo from the stable tower, and at the sound Lyndhurst—who had been industriously writing—started up and glanced at his watch. Apparently he meditated retiring, for he came to the window and mechanically closed the shutters without looking out.

As she heard the iron-bar swing in its socket a little cry of relief escaped Lilith's lips. Her vigil was over—there was no danger to Colin now, and she was at liberty to go indoors.

She slipped softly round to the front of the house, and then a sudden appalling thought occurred to her. The servants had gone to bed, the doors were all fastened; how was she to get in without being seen?

Useless to hope that any of the exits had been overlooked. The butler always went round last thing to see that everything was

secure, and there was no chance of his having forgotten to do so to-night.

Lilith was in consternation. There was only one alternative—either she stayed out all night, and slipped in unseen first thing in the morning, or she must boldly knock at the door, and keep on knocking until she was admitted.

Of course the former plan was utterly impracticable, as a minute's thought was sufficient to tell her. With her thin attire, braving the cold of the long hours that must elapse till dawn, meant running a risk which nothing could justify. Strangely enough, the risk to her health was the only one Lilith thought of; that to her reputation, in case the circumstance became known, never once struck her.

However, when she concluded that her only plan was to knock, she lost no time in doing it—not loudly, but just loud enough to reach Lyndhurst's ears if he chanced to be in the study.

It would be better, she reflected, for him to let her in than one of the servants. Her expectations were fulfilled. Lyndhurst *did* hear her, and at once unlocked and unbarred the door, wondering who the late visitor could be. His surprise when he saw her may be imagined.

He stood for a moment looking at her, as if he could hardly believe his eyes, then he uttered her name.

"Yes," she said, entering, and shaking out the damp folds of her dress. "It is I—I forgot that the door would be locked."

"But where have you been?"

"Out in the grounds for a walk," she added, in a hesitating manner, that at once told Lyndhurst the excuse was untrue.

"A strange time of night for you to choose!" he observed, sarcastically; then, touching her attire, "you must have been out a long time—your dress is quite wet, and it is with dew, for it has not been raining."

"Yes," she assented, a little absently. "It

is with dew. I am very tired; I want to go to bed."

"Stay a minute!" Lyndhurst cried, sternly, catching hold of her arm. "With whom have you been?"

"With whom?" She broke into a dreary laugh. "I have been alone."

And then she went upstairs, leaving him standing in the hall, gazing after her, half bewildered. Her voice and manner were both strange, and he did not know what meaning to attach to them.

Colin was not suspicious, but the fact of his wife being out at this time of night naturally required explanation, and that she had not thought it worth while to give. She had said she was alone, but that she should be wandering about at such an hour, and in such a dress for the mere pleasure of taking the air, seemed incredible.

He had opened the door which she had pushed to, and looked out into the darkness. The air was moist, clammy, and cold; the sky still overclouded, and not a star visible.

As Lyndhurst stood there his figure was clearly defined against the light in the hall, and there was no danger of his being mistaken for one of the servants—his tall stature and splendid physique being much too individual to be mistaken.

A loud report rang out on the air, cleaving the silence sharply and distinctly. Lilith heard it as she was going upstairs, and rushed down in time to see her husband stagger backward against the wall. Her watch had been in vain. Destiny was too strong for her, and Stephen Brooks had wreaked his vengeance.

(To be continued.)

EVERY event that a man would master must be mounted on the run, and no man ever caught the reins of a thought except as it galloped by him.





[A VAIN STRUGGLE FOR VICTORY.]

NOVELLETTE.]

## BETWEEN TWO FOES.

—O—

## CHAPTER I.

"Where shall we dine?"

"At my own particular Restaurant," was the reply to this question. "We are on our way to it now. Surely you do not imagine, *mon ami*, that such an important matter could be decided on the spur of the moment? I settled where we should dine and what the dinner was to consist of as soon as I rose this morning! To dine well, my dear young friend, is, or should be, the event of the day."

The speaker, a stout, elderly, well-dressed Frenchman, with small, twinkling, dark eyes, glossy dark hair, and moustache, waved his plump hands, encased in lemon-coloured kid gloves, gently to and fro to give emphasis to his assertion, as the two men were driven rapidly through the streets of St. Petersburg. His companion, a young Englishman, only laughed.

"I am hungry enough to devour the traditional raw 'bistek' that we English are supposed to be so much attached to," he replied, lightly.

A fearful confession this, made to one who regarded cookery as a fine art, intended to serve higher purposes than the mere satisfying of vulgar appetite.

M. Gustave Vaudrey shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"A savage eats when he is hungry to appease the cravings of nature," he said, in a tone of good-humoured tolerance. "The epicure sits down to appreciate the fine blending of tastes and flavours, the fresh combinations of fish, flesh, game, and vegetable placed before him by that incomparable artist, a good cook. A few years hence you will recognise the truth contained in my

words. It is only the young who have the digestion of the ostrich, and care little what they eat."

"Always providing there is plenty of it," interposed John Marlowe.

He was a tall, stalwart, handsome young fellow of three-and-twenty, with regular features, mirthful grey eyes, a brown drooping moustache, and close-clipped brown hair, his English origin asserting itself too plainly in face and bearing to admit of any mistake upon that point.

The junior partner in the large mercantile firm of Clark, Danvers, Marlowe, and Co., John Marlowe, had been sent out to superintend a branch business recently established in St. Petersburg. Young as he was he had plenty of business capacity, and the prospect of a long stay in the great Northern City pleased him immensely, since it must needs open up so many fresh experiences to him.

He had little to distinguish him from thousands of other well-bred, well-educated young Englishmen. His sense of honour was keen; he had a strong relish for anything in the shape of an adventure. What he lacked in enthusiasm or imagination he made up for in sound common sense and dogged perseverance.

He had brought several letters of introduction to St. Petersburg with him. Hence his acquaintance with M. Vaudrey, a wealthy Frenchman, who had once been connected with the firm, and who gladly availed himself of this opportunity to show some courtesy to the junior partner. They had been viewing some of the "lions" of St. Petersburg that day, and it was a fine if not a critical appetite that the young Marlowe brought to bear upon the dinner ordered by M. Vaudrey at the fashionable restaurant he affected.

The two men dined at a separate table. But little conversation took place between them during the meal, M. Vaudrey seldom

speaking save to recommend some special dish forming part of the menu. A bachelor and a gourmand, his daily fare, especially the principal meal, dinner, occupied his thoughts and attention almost exclusively. The claret he chose was *Chateau Lafitte*, the champagne *Heidsieck*. John Marlowe regarded him, as he sat there with a large white napkin arranged bib-fashion over his elaborate shirt-front, gobbling greedily, allowing no dish to pass him, with a blending of amusement and contempt.

"Try that cheese omelette, *mon cher*," said the Frenchman persuasively; "it is perfection!"

"Thanks—I have dined," was the reply, as the young man allowed his glance to wander curiously round the large, brilliantly lighted restaurant. "What are we going to do with ourselves after dinner, M. Vaudrey?"

"We can go to the theatre or the opera, whichever you prefer. At your age bright eyes and pretty faces are more attractive than such a menu as this. Ah, I know, I know. I, too, have been young and susceptible."

John Marlowe laughed.

"I am not very susceptible," he said carelessly. "I should never allow a woman to make a fool of me, for instance. At the same time I admit a preference for pretty faces over plain ones. Let us go to the theatre, by all means. By-the-by, since you have kindly undertaken the office of bear-leader, you must not omit to bring some Nihilists under my notice while I remain here. I want to 'do' St. Petersburg properly, you know, and Nihilism is one of its strong features."

He spoke in somewhat heightened tones; the good wine had warmed him. M. Vaudrey glanced apprehensively around. It was soon after the assassination of the Emperor Nicholas, and the very name of Nihilist carried danger and terror with it.

"That I cannot do," he replied aloud. "Fortunately I am not acquainted with any

of the misguided people you allude to." Then, in a lower voice, "For Heaven's sake, be careful what you say, *mon ami*! We are in Russia, remember, where spies and informers abound. Such a remark as that just made would be sufficient to render us objects of suspicion if overheard. Nihilists were never in worse odour than at present. This is not London, where people can say what they like with impunity."

"Such a reign of terror would not be tolerated there for a week," said Marlowe, proudly, conscious of the superior privileges he enjoyed as an Englishman.

Presently they paid their bill and left the restaurant. It was but a short distance to the theatre, and Marlowe, desirous of studying Russian street life, proposed that they should go there on foot.

They had well-nigh reached the theatre when a little crowd arrested their progress.

"What is the matter?" inquired M. Vaudrey of a peasant standing close by.

"Only a dog run over," said the man, "and the girl it belongs to is making as much fuss as if it were a child. They had better kill it outright."

"Come along," said the Frenchman, touching his companion lightly on the shoulder, "or we shall be late. Only a dog."

But Jack Marlowe merely pushed his way farther into the crowd. He had caught sight of a young girl kneeling beside the injured hound; a girl dressed simply in black, with a face of marble pallor, large, clear cold blue eyes, and wavy golden hair cut short like a boy's. The distress, the dumb, helpless misery in those eyes as they met his for a second, appealed forcibly to the Englishman's sense of chivalry. Conscious only of a desire to aid her he stooped over the dog whose hind legs had been injured, rendering him unable to walk, and addressed the girl in broken Russian.

"Can I be of any assistance?" he inquired. "What do you wish done with the poor brute?"

She looked up hastily.

"If he could but be taken home," she replied, "I live not far from here. I cannot carry him, however, and I have no money to pay for a cab. My poor Cossack! Oh, what can I do?"

"Tell me where you live, and I will carry him for you," said Marlowe, lifting the great hound, who moaned feebly, in his arms.

"What folly!" snapped M. Vaudrey, angrily; "it is not your affair or mine. Put the girl and the dog into a cab if you must do something, and let them go. We shall have the police here directly."

"They have no right to interfere with my actions," said Marlowe, hotly. "Police be hanged! See what distress she is in—would it be kind to leave her? Pardon my brief desertion of you, M. Vaudrey. I will join you at the theatre an hour hence."

With these words he walked quickly away, carrying the dog; the girl, who had merely looked her thanks as yet, acting as guide. M. Vaudrey took an opposite direction.

"This is what I get for consenting to accompany a mad Englishman about St. Petersburg," he reflected, with a cynical shrug. "One never knows in what fresh place they are going to break out next, these English. The girl had a pretty face—so much the worse. Well, if she leads him into trouble I am not responsible. I did my utmost to warn him, and he is not an infant this young Marlowe; he has plenty of *servoir vivre*."

Meanwhile Marlowe had reached the house where the girl lodged—a dismal, tumble-down building in a back street. She led the way up three flights of stairs, then threw open the door of a room, and set light to a wick floating in tallow, contained in a cracked china cup.

It was a very small room, furnished in meagre style. A table, two chairs, a large wooden chest, some hanging bookshelves, and a few cheap tawdry prints of popular Russian saints dispersed about the damp walls com-

prised its contents. Beyond this room was the cupboard-like recess that formed the sleeping apartment.

Marlowe placed the dog gently on the floor, then proceeded to examine his injuries. The hind legs, although badly cut and bruised, were not broken. The dog's mistress having fetched a sponge and some water Marlowe bathed the wounded limbs, and bound them up in soft wet linen rags, produced from the great chest, the poor hound licking his hands gratefully during the process. He had well-nigh finished his self-imposed task when a sob from the girl caused him to look up. She was crying.

"I cannot express my gratitude for what you have done," she said, quietly, dabbling the tears away as though she had been ashamed of them. "You relieved me from a painful dilemma, and kindness in any shape or form is so new and strange to me. Perhaps you think it foolish to care so much for a dog, but Cossack is the only friend I have left in the world. Without him I should be quite alone."

"Do you live here by yourself then?" asked Jack Marlowe, rising from his knees, and surveying her with a blending of curiosity and keen interest.

"Yes, I am a teacher of languages," she replied. "We have to make our own way in the world, Cossack and I. As a rule we manage very well. Only this accident to the dog unnerves me. Do you think he will be permanently lamed by it?"

"No; when those cuts heal he will be all right again. Of course for some time to come the legs will be stiff and painful. You have only to keep them well bathed. I have not had the pleasure yet," he continued in his awkward Russian, "of hearing your name mentioned."

"It is Nina Koecher," she said, with a smile. "Do you speak French, monsieur?"

"My French is preferable to my Russian," he replied; "that I know to be vile. As you say, we can converse so much more easily in French;" then, after a moment's hesitation, "I require some lessons in your native language. Perhaps you—"

"Would act as my teacher," she interposed, finishing the sentence for him. "No, monsieur, I cannot do that. I have no young men among my pupils, but I can introduce you to a gentleman who will soon improve your knowledge of Russian."

How ready she was, how calm and self-possessed! She could not be more than nineteen, yet no trace of girlish timidity or bashfulness betrayed itself in her attitude towards this perfect stranger, standing in her poor room. No touch of colour warmed the marble pallor of her beautiful, passionless face, with its firm, thoughtful expression, beneath which lurked a perpetual watchfulness.

Looking at her, Jack Marlowe told himself that she possessed reserve forces of courage, will, and strong pronounced character, in spite of her calm, indifferent manner. She was precisely the sort of girl to do and dare anything under exceptional circumstances—to be potent for either good or evil.

He might have been a man of eighty, she evinced so little self-consciousness in addressing him. Jack Marlowe felt rather piqued.

"You distrust me, in short?" he remarked, yet without attempting to depart.

"No," she replied, her cold, clear, blue eyes gazing frankly into his. "As a rule, you English are honourable. Am I right in deeming you to be an Englishman?"

"Yes."

"You have been kind to me," she continued, "and I would not have you think me rude and ungrateful in return. In refusing to give you lessons I study your interests as well as my own. I am a lonely girl, with a character to maintain, while some day events might lead you to regret that you had ever had dealings with me!"

What could she mean? Morally there could be nothing amiss with such a strange, self-reliant girl. Surely—

"My words have perplexed you," she went on, stooping to caress the dog; "let them pass. You can easily understand that it is out of the question for me to act as your instructor. We are both too young for that to pass unnoticed by the world."

"Exactly," he stammered. "Pardon me for not having taken that sufficiently into consideration. The proposal on my part was perfectly honest—made on the spur of the moment."

"I know it," replied Nina Koecher, calm and unruffled as ever, "and I like you all the better for it. Shall we shake hands before we part?"

"It seems to me," said Jack Marlowe, retaining her firm white hand in his a little longer than necessary, "that you ought not to live here by yourself. Have you no female companion? You are much too young, and too pretty, pardon me for saying so, to dwell quite alone. At least, that would be the opinion in England."

A bitter smile curved the young girl's lovely mouth.

"Ah, yes, in England!" she said, slowly; "but everything is so different there. Your English girls, in their soft, pleasant, domestic atmosphere, know nothing of the forces and influences that render many of their Russian sisters prematurely old and world-worn. Believe me, I am quite able to take care of myself. I have lived alone ever since my parent's death."

"In that long ago?" he asked, unable to account for the interest she had aroused within his breast.

"About six years," was the reply. "My mother died of a broken heart. My father—was a martyr? And now, M. Marlowe, I must ask you to leave us; it is getting late. Cossack and I shall always cherish your memory—the memory of a friend."

"May I not call in the course of a day or two to inquire if he is recovering?" pleaded Marlowe, an eloquent look in his handsome grey eyes.

"As you please!" she said, a faint flush crossing her cheek for the first time; "but if you take my advice, if you are wise, you will stay away."

Having lighted her visitor down the broken stairs, Nina Koecher returned to her room and closed the door. She threw herself down beside the hound, and kissed the massive head lovingly.

"Oh, Cossack! dear old Cossack! what a splendid fellow!" she murmured. "You need not look vain and thump your tail on the floor. I don't mean you, but the Englishman. How bravely he came to the rescue, and carried you home, although you were so muddy, and he so well dressed. A Russian would hardly have done that, or a Frenchman. There's something at once brave and tender about the English. That absurd offer respecting the lessons was made in good faith. He would have pressed money upon me, I knew, only he feared to insult me. And then his voice, so frank, free, high-toned—the voice of a man happily oblivious of espionage or stealthy eavesdroppers, accustomed from his infancy to enjoy liberty of speech and action! Shall we ever meet again, I wonder? It is unlikely—indeed, I must forbid him coming here, should he make the attempt. Am I going mad that I sit here with my thoughts running upon the Englishman, while the cause to which I have pledged myself requires them all?"

She rose as she spoke and gave the dog his supper, and ate her own, consisting of black bread with sausage. After supper she lifted a board from the rotten flooring, and drew forth several works of a revolutionary character. The bookshelves contained only the grammars and dictionaries required in her capacity as teacher of languages.

For more than an hour Nina Koecher sat at the table reading intently.

Then she replaced the dangerous books in their hiding-place, patted the dog, put on her walking things, and stole quietly out.



The long severe Russian winter had not yet set in. The weather was almost mild, the moon shone brightly. As Nina Koecher walked swiftly away from the house in which she lodged a lurking form detached itself from the shadows and followed her at a safe distance, unaware that, in turn, it too was followed by another.

## CHAPTER II.

A Russian boudoir, fitted up in the latest French mode. Splendid carpets, hand-painted panels, pictures, bronzes, statuettes, testified to the wealth of the owner. Tall palms in vases stood in the window recesses, hot house flowers scented the air with their fragrance, large mirrors reflected the beauty of the room in every direction. The prevailing tints were azure and pale gold, the curtains shading the windows were of the richest lace, looped back with broad bands of azure silk.

The house, situated in the most fashionable quarter of St. Petersburg, belonged to a wealthy Russian merchant, Isaac Tokmakoff; the boudoir had been especially prepared for his only daughter and heiress—Pauline.

Isaac Tokmakoff had married a Frenchwoman, long since dead. Pauline had been chiefly educated in Paris—all her sympathies and instincts were French. With her native country—Russia—the young lady felt that she had not much in common.

Pauline Tokmakoff was a tall, sinuously elegant woman of twenty, with mobile expressive features, a sallow complexion, large dark eyes, and coarse but abundant dark hair. Her dresses, principally supplied by Worth, fitted her exquisitely, and were always harmonious in colour and draping. The wealthy Russian idolized his daughter; no whim of hers was allowed to remain ungratified. Indiscriminate indulgence had not been without its effect upon Pauline's character. Passionate, wilful, capricious, and extremely selfish, haughty as the Czar himself, Pauline contrived to keep the household in a continual ferment, although her doting father could perceive no fault in his child. Society, which only saw her under a more pleasing aspect with her true nature repressed, was also inclined to make a favourite of the lively, clever French girl. Pauline had received more than one good offer which, oddly enough, she had refused without any apparent reason.

On the day after Cosack met with his accident, Pauline sat in her boudoir reading, or pretending to read, with the door a little way open. She was listening intently for a footstep. Presently it came. Throwing aside her French novel she glided gently to the door just in time to intercept Paul Perovsky, her father's confidential clerk, on his way downstairs from an interview which he had been holding with his principal.

"Can you spare a few minutes, or are you in great haste, M. Perovsky?" she inquired, a soft caressing inflection enhancing the charm of her rich, musical voice, a smile hovering around her lips.

What could the young man say but that he was entirely at her disposal? What could he do but follow his employer's daughter into the boudoir at her request?

Paul Perovsky, considering his purely Russian origin, was a very handsome man, tall and well set up, with regular if somewhat heavy features; large, rather mournful blue eyes, fair hair and moustache. Although still young, and on the right side of thirty, he had resided so much in other countries that all traces of Russian savagery had long since vanished, giving place to the easy, well-bred air that distinguishes a man of the world.

"You are such an excellent amateur musician," Pauline explained, raising her eyes, full of subtle fire to his, "and I have a new instrument here. I want you to try it, to tell me what you think of the tone?"

"Certainly! I shall be most happy."

The words were polite, but the conventional

manner in which they were uttered without the least *empressment* or sense of favour received, caused Pauline both pain and anger. The clerk seated himself at the instrument and commenced playing some selections from the last new opera; then he glided into the famous Moonlight Sonata, playing with the air of a man whose soul is in the music to which his sympathetic touch gives rise.

Pauline reclined in a low seat beside him, occasionally turning over the leaves of the music, listening intently, her glance seldom straying from his face. A rare honour this, proceeding from his employer's proud capricious daughter, sufficient to have turned the heads of nine clerks out of ten. Paul must have been the tenth. By not so much as a word or look did he presume upon the partiality evinced, or strive to ingratiate himself yet further with the heiress. He was courteous and deferential in his bearing towards her, nothing more. Pauline bit her lips to conceal the mortification she endured. This was not the first time she had failed in her attempt to establish warmer relations between them.

"The instrument is a good one," said the confidential clerk, as he ceased playing; "the tone is rich and full; even to touch such a piano is a privilege seldom enjoyed—at least by me."

"I could listen to your playing for hours!" she replied, softly. "It is sympathetic; it speaks to the heart, and when one is unhappy music seems to give a charm unknown before."

Contrary to her expectations Paul Perovsky failed to follow the subject up, to evince any interest in the sorrow so pathetically alluded to. Modestly disclaiming the genial compliment paid to his musical talent, he chatted with his master's daughter for a few minutes on indifferent topics, then left the boudoir and its fair occupant to return to his duties.

Left to herself Pauline paced rapidly up and down the room, the great mirror reflecting her pale, passionate face.

"If he were but as responsive as the instrument to my touch!" she exclaimed, angrily. "To stoop as I have done, to bestow such marks of favour upon him, favours denied to men infinitely his superiors in rank and wealth, and to meet with no response! Ah, it is terrible. I cannot, I will not, endure it! Now that I have fathomed the secret of his indifference to me the power to win him is in my hands, and I will use it mercilessly. No other woman shall be permitted to come between me and the man I love."

Yes, it amounted to this. Pauline Tokmakoff, proud, cruel, selfish as she was, had fallen deeply in love with her father's confidential clerk. If her love were but requited she was willing to abandon the ambitious matrimonial schemes that had once filled her mind, to brave her father's anger, providing she might become the young Russian's wife. That undisciplined emotional nature of hers had gone out in his direction with a force admitting of no control.

Presently Pauline rang her bell, and a maid servant appeared, a middle-aged woman, with small light eyes, pug features, and sandy hair.

"Elizabeth, tell me again what you saw last night when—I sent you out upon an errand," she said imperiously, bending a fan she had caught up from a side-table in her white nervous hands till one of the sticks of carved sandal-wood broke.

"I saw M. Perovsky going towards Nina Koecher's lodgings," replied Elizabeth stolidly, a crafty light shining in her small eyes. "I followed him. He waited in the shadow of the houses till she came out; then he went after her cautiously, keeping at a distance for half a mile or so, with me always behind him. Presently he quickened his pace and overtook her. She did not seem surprised; doubtless the affair had been arranged between them beforehand. They talked together for a

while, then went on side by side. I dared not follow them any further, for the space had become broad and open, and the moon shone brightly. They would have detected me."

"And you could not approach near enough to hear what they were saying—to catch their words?"

"Holy saints, no! That would have been dangerous. But I have eyes, and the attitude of M. Perovsky was that of a lover."

"You can go now," said Pauline abruptly. "If you are silent and discreet I shall not forget to reward you."

She was under the influence of the meanest instincts in her scheming and selfish nature. Wild hopes rioted within her. Passionate desires united themselves with capacities for wickedness which had been the tropical growth of a single night.

Paul Perovsky was in love with Nina Koecher, a poor teacher of languages; a girl engaged in earning her daily bread. This was the secret of the clerk's indifference to his master's daughter.

Crossed for the first time in her life, furiously jealous and indignant, Pauline vowed to separate the lovers, to put into action at once the pitiless plan that had suggested itself to her fertile brain.

Nina Koecher was personally known to her. They had been schoolfellows ere Pauline went to Paris to complete her education there. From some words Nina had once let fall at the school in St. Petersburg, Pauline believed her to sympathise strongly with the Nihilists. What more likely than that she had espoused their cause, and joined their ranks upon becoming her own mistress? She was precisely the sort of girl to identify herself with the weak and the oppressed, to fight boldly in the cause of freedom.

If so, if this could be proved against her, Nina would stand but a poor chance now that the Nihilists were in worse odour than ever. Death or life-long exile in Siberia would await the detected Nihilist, while Paul Perovsky, in self-defence, would be only too glad to disclaim any knowledge of the girl, to ignore their past relations as lovers.

Nina once out of the way, his eyes would be opened to the enormity of her doings, and the splendid matrimonial chance awaiting him so near home. He would no longer remain blind to Pauline's love and the many evidences of favour she bestowed upon him when they met. And this might easily be accomplished, supposing the basis of the plot, the Nihilistic tendencies, to be more than a conjecture on her part.

Pauline, with the perfect heartlessness of a depraved nature, decided to write to Nina, inviting the girl to stay with her for a time on the strength of that school acquaintance, revived for the occasion. In this manner, by watching her carefully, she hoped to obtain a clue to Nina's doings, to ascertain if she were really connected with the Nihilists, and to what extent. Should her suspicions prove correct, and Nina be involved to any extent, a communication to the police and her arrest would speedily follow.

"As my guest I shall have countless opportunities of talking with her, and observing her behaviour," reflected Pauline, sitting down at her writing-table to pen that Judas invitation on thick cream-laid scented paper. "In some confidential moment the truth is sure to leak out inadvertently, even if she hesitates to repose full trust in me. I know well how to lead up to a subject without appearing to do so. Six months hence Nina Koecher may find herself in Siberia, whither her lover—then mine—would hardly care to follow her, even if he felt inclined, and I give him credit for having better sense than to do so."

The lonely, friendless girl fell into the cruel trap laid for her by Pauline. Keen and cautious as circumstances had made her, Nina discerned no evil motive lurking beneath the invitation received. It was certainly strange that Pauline Tokmakoff, her wealthy school-fellow, should deign to notice her after a lapse

of several years, especially when she had scarcely recognised the existence of the artful pupil during the time they had spent under the same roof.

Nina had not forgotten Pauline's capricious wayward nature, however, to which she attributed the friendly invitation. Some whim had induced the heiress to seek her out, and request the pleasure of her society for awhile. Nina, after a little hesitation, decided to go; the change would be agreeable. She wrote to Pauline, accepting the offer, and asking if she might bring her dog, Cossack, with her, since she had no one in whose care she could leave him during her absence.

Pauline graciously consented to receive Cossack. She would have entertained a tame bear rather than allow such a chance of ruining the unsuspicious girl to slip through her fingers.

Perhaps Nina entertained the prospect of a temporary change the more because she had been feeling restless and unlike herself of late.

The uneasy, troubled symptoms, the new, strange emotions she found it so hard to define as they rose within her, all dated from her meeting with the young Englishman—John Marlowe.

Until then, one stern, set, unwavering purpose had filled her life, rendering her oblivious to youth, beauty, love, and the kindred subjects that usually sway a girl's mind. With a man's concentration of purpose she had braced herself to suffer and endure in a noble cause, to lose sight of all individual aims and motives, the better to fit herself for the work she had to do.

Jack Marlowe's eloquent grey eyes, his kindly words, had wrought a revolution in Nina's inner life. As if a mist had suddenly dispersed she became keenly aware of the isolation and barrenness of her own life, its hard, cruel, loveless aspect, unredeemed by any hopes of a grand future. For the first time she tortured herself by imagining what life might be like, rich and glowing with happiness, as compared with what it was. She felt discontented and vaguely unhappy, ever on the watch for a voice, a footstep, which she had yet done her utmost to banish.

Was it possible that the love she had disapproved of in others as a sign of weakness had taken possession of her, bent upon proving its strength and intensity at the expense of her peace of mind?

The change from her poor room to a luxurious mansion might help to banish these haunting fancies and regrets. Hence her ready acceptance of Pauline's offer. Not without a feeling of womanly mortification at the poorness and shabbiness of the clothes she took with her, Nina made her few preparations, and left her lodging for Isaac Tokmakoff's splendid residence.

Pauline received her old schoolfellow with a warm, effusive welcome, gracefully toned down by good-breeding. She was so lonely, she explained; she had many acquaintances, but few intimate friends. It occurred to her to invite Nina, whom she had always liked when at school, to be her guest and companion for awhile; and Nina, generous and sincere herself, accepted the explanation in good faith, feeling grateful to Pauline for the kindness displayed.

A luxuriously furnished bedroom opening out of her own had been prepared for Pauline's visitor.

Nina uttered an exclamation of delight when she saw it, unaware that its nearness to Pauline's gave that young lady plenty of opportunities to inspect her papers, letters, dresses, books, and so forth, when she happened to be out of the way.

Isaac Tokmakoff in no wise objected to Nina's presence in his house. Immersed in business as he was, he had but little time and leisure to bestow even upon his idolized daughter. If Pauline liked to have this young girl staying with her, why she was perfectly welcome to do so.

Pauline, ever on the watch for some incriminating disclosure, some heedless remark that

would give her the clue she needed with which to betray her rival, apparently treated that rival well. She even contrived to make some additions to Nina's scanty wardrobe in a manner calculated to disarm the gift of anything hurtful, to avoid wounding the recipient's pride. Her fiendish motive became the more terrible by reason of the friendly, hospitable cloak beneath which it was concealed.

Cossack, whose legs were still sore and painful, came in for a great deal of petting and attention.

Nina related the manner in which he had met with his accident, and the kindness subsequently displayed by the Englishman. She did not, however, allude to the impression made by the Englishman upon her heart.

It might have comforted Nina had she known that Jack Marlowe was very far off from forgetting her. The impression had been mutual.

The young man's thoughts were constantly reverting to the pale, proud, beautiful girl, at once so lonely and so self-reliant. She was something new in his experience of woman-kind; he wanted to know more of her, to gain her confidence.

The author of many flirtations, Jack Marlowe had never yet fallen seriously in love. He could not, however, banish this Russian girl's image from his mind. It haunted him persistently. To let her pass out of his life without an effort was not to be thought of.

Accordingly, he called at Nina's lodgings to inquire after Cossack. To his annoyance he was told that she had gone away on a visit, taking the dog with her. This repulse had the effect of rendering him more anxious than ever to meet her again.

A few days later his wish was granted.

Nina, who could not afford to neglect her pupils even for the sake of a holiday, was on her way back to Pauline's residence, after giving a lesson, when she encountered Jack Marlowe in the street. His eyes brightened as they rested upon Nina; hers went through a similar process.

"I have been looking for you," he said, his deep, musical voice thrilling her with an ecstasy akin to pain. "I—I wanted to know how the dog was getting on. The public gardens are close by. Shall we go in there for a while, and you can tell me about Cossack?"

They went.

### CHAPTER III.

JACK MARLOWE led his companion to a seat placed in one of the side walks of the public gardens. The day was fine and clear, the golden cupola of St. Isaac gleamed in the sunlight, the colossal statues scattered about the vast city stood out in bold relief, the steel-blue river wound swiftly along beneath its numerous bridges. St. Petersburg was looking its best.

"I called at your lodging a few days ago," he said, "only to learn that you were away on a visit."

"I received an unexpected invitation," she replied, "from an old school-fellow, the daughter of one of our richest merchants, to stay with her for a while. I thought she had forgotten me long ago. It was pleasant to find myself still remembered, and I went."

"Are you still this lady's guest, may I ask?"

"Yes. I am on my way to her house now. I have been to give a lesson. I cannot neglect my pupils, you know!"

She spoke coldly, lest he should detect the joy this meeting had afforded her. She was inclined to be angry with herself for yielding to his request, and entering the gardens.

"And Cossack?"

"Is much better already, thank you."

"You can't imagine," he continued, earnestly, in French, "how awfully disappointed I felt when they told me you were from home. I am so glad to have met you again!"

"I advised you, in your own interests, not to call again at my lodgings," she replied. "Dear me," glancing at her little silver watch, "I had no idea it was so late. I must leave you, monsieur, with many thanks for the favour rendered the other day."

"You are unkind," said Jack Marlowe, reproachfully. "We have scarcely met, yet you are anxious to hurry away from me. What have I done to incur your suspicion?"

"Done; not anything," she rejoined, slowly. "As I said once before I feel that you are to be trusted, and I am grateful to you—very grateful—for your kindness to Cossack. But you and I have so little in common, M. Marlowe, that it will be wise for us to remain apart without becoming better acquainted. I am only a poor teacher of languages, whereas you—"

"Have inherited money and a position which I might not have had the brains to earn for myself," he said, good-humouredly, proceeding to give her a brief sketch of his history, and the business that had brought him to St. Petersburg. "I fail to see, though," he continued, "why we should not become better acquainted with each other. Without any desire to appear impertinent I may tell you that your lonely condition has saddened me whenever I thought of it. Here am I—a great strong fellow with plenty of friends, while you—a young girl—are fighting the world singlehanded! I wish you would tell me more of your past history. It is no idle curiosity that prompts me in making the request."

For a moment she hesitated. Then the earnest, pleading, manly tones, the handsome face, proved too much for her resolve to remain silent.

"There is little to tell," she said, quietly, "and that little breathes of sadness and oppression. My father was an inventor, a dreamy, unpractical man, absorbed in his models and plans, yet with plenty of love to spare for my mother and myself. As an only child a great deal of love and tenderness were lavished upon me by those dear parents, whose memory I still hold sacred. In an evil hour a friend of my father's was arrested, charged with being a Nihilist, actively engaged in propagating the doctrines of freedom and liberty throughout the country. My father was called upon to give evidence against his friend. This he refused to do; and consequently he, the gentle, gifted, harmless man was torn from his home and thrust into one of the subaqueous dungeons in the fortress of Peter and Paul, over which the Neva flows. We never saw him again; he died there either of starvation and neglect, or by drowning, we could not ascertain which. My mother, who was passionately attached to her husband, could not survive the shock of his fearful death. It broke her heart, and I, their unhappy child, old enough to understand the double loss I had sustained, was left an orphan."

She paused, as if to gather courage to proceed, but no tears shone in her blue eyes; fire seemed to glow within their liquid depths instead.

"What I suffered," she continued, "I can hardly describe to you. But I was not one to sink beneath my burden. A fierce desire to avenge the wrongs my parents had sustained, to fight against their enemies, took possession of me. From the hour of my mother's death this desire has been uppermost in my mind. As long as I live it will influence me. Why, I should hold this poor life well spent could I, by sacrificing it, advance the sacred cause of freedom one step upon its way?"

She spoke with enthusiasm at last; her eyes glowed, she had never appeared more beautiful than in this denunciation of tyranny and injustice. Jack Marlowe regarded her admiringly, pityingly, with a great fear tugging the while at his heart.

"Tell me plainly," he whispered. "I will never betray you. Are you a Nihilist?"

Again she hesitated. An open avowal



might lose for her the liking and esteem of this man, gifts which had become unspeakably precious to her. Then the noble, fearless nature, conquered the brief dread.

"Yes, I am a Nihilist!" she said, firmly, "pledged to support and obey the cause unconditionally."

Jack Marlowe's face fell; he made no immediate reply. The change of expression did not escape Nina. She attributed it to annoyance and some personal apprehension.

"I told you," she continued, coldly, "that you had best avoid me, and now you know why. My admission has distressed you; the consequences of being acquainted with a Nihilist, the unpleasant embarrassing results, to say no worse, are passing through your mind. You heartily wish that you had not encountered me. Well, from to-day if we meet it shall be as strangers, and now let us part."

"By Heaven, you wrong me!" cried the young fellow, angrily. "I am not the miserable coward you depict. If I regret the fact of your being a Nihilist it is because of the probable results to yourself, the disgrace, imprisonment, death, or exile that might await you were you detected. Why, were you to be arrested to-morrow I would come forward to say and do what I could in your favour."

"Forgive me," she murmured, a tremor of intense happiness passing through her. She had not been mistaken, then, in deeming him to be brave, fearless, true as steel; "but, as a rule, all those who do not belong to us shrink from us. They think naturally of the danger to themselves involved."

"That did not occur to me," said Jack Marlowe; "but I own that you have made me very anxious on your account, Nina! May I call you by that name? It is horrible to reflect that, at any moment, a cruel fate, a punishment worse than death, may be in store for you—and you so young!"

"We recruit our ranks from among the young and ardent," replied the girl, proudly, "and whenever Jack volunteers—men and women willing to lay down their lives for the cause, to propagate its doctrines among the peasantry. Before I was permitted to pass beneath the gloomy portal I had it all placed before me—the oblivion that attends even martyrs, the obscure suffering, the probable shame, disgrace, exile, death, crime, that might await me; yet, nothing daunted, I took the oath and became what I am—a Nihilist."

"You are a glorious girl!" said Jack Marlowe, half tenderly, half admiringly; "but I wish from my heart that you occupied a less dangerous position."

"I have no fear," she replied, with a smile; "and already I have been of some little use to my party. Tell me truthfully, do you sympathize with us, Mr. Marlowe. Are you willing to identify yourself with us in any way?"

Jack drew himself up, once more the cautious, unimaginative, tax-paying British citizen. He might have been bad enough to fall in love with a pretty Nihilist—indeed, he felt almost sure that he had; but he was not so insane as to become a Nihilist himself at her instigation.

"You must bear in mind that I am an Englishman," he said, sensibly, "and the great question of representative government for Russia does not affect me very closely. If I were a Russian, now, I should feel bound to take sides; as it is I prefer to remain neutral. Individually I take great interest in Russia—as represented by you; collectively I must decline involving myself in the struggle now going on. None the less, I wish us to remain firm friends. Nina, promise that you will always regard me as a friend? Your secret is safe in my keeping."

"Very well, since you wish it we will be friends, M. Marlowe," she replied, allowing her blue eyes to glance into his gray ones for an instant.

"How I wish you could speak English!" was his next remark, uttered in a regretful tone.

"I can learn," was the quiet reply.

"Do; and let us meet here from time to time for me to ascertain what progress you are making. Since we are friends, you will not be offended at this question of mine. Have you no income beyond what you derive from your teaching?"

"No! But that is sufficient for my simple wants," said Nina. "Later on, however, I shall inherit my fortune."

"What do you mean?"

"My father intrusted a sum of money—not a very large one—to Ivan Tolstoy, a money-lender in St. Petersburg, previous to his imprisonment. It is to be mine, capital and interest, when I come of age. More than once, when hard-pressed, I have requested Ivan to advance me a little of this money; but he invariably refused. He is a very hard man. When I come of age, however, he must refund it all—he knows that. Until then I can manage very well—I have plenty of pupils now. M. Marlowe, do not detain me here any longer, or Pauline will think I am lost."

"Will you meet me here a week hence?" he demanded.

"Yes, if I can."

"That is a promise; friends like to see each other frequently, you know. Nina, darling, will you not give me one kiss, just to seal our friendship?"

She made no reply; she seemed to be yielding to his magnetic influence in spite of herself and her previous hard, joyless line of conduct, as it were. But the two heads drew nearer to each other, nearer still, and Jack Marlowe's lips were pressed to hers in a long clinging kiss, while love, immortal love, triumphing over all other emotions, seized the opportunity to exchange their hearts once and for ever. Friendship, forsooth!

An old man with a grey beard and lynx-like eyes witnessed the parting from behind some shrubs. His glance followed Nina as she sped swiftly away in an opposite direction to that taken by Jack Marlowe.

"Nina Koecher," he muttered, with a contraction of his brows; "one of us! Who could her companion be? I must ascertain. Not that Nina is likely to prove a traitor, but some dangerous admission might be obtained from her by that man, since she is evidently in love with him, and on that account less cautious. Ah, youth, youth! you must needs have your pleasant dalliance! The young blood stirs in your veins like sap in the trees at springtime. It is only the old who can trudge along the stern, hard path of duty, with no yearnings after love and pleasure. Young hearts are brave and true, as we have proved, but they must needs incline towards each other; they must beat in unison in order to be happy. Well, providing it does not impede or injure the work in hand, I, for one, have no objection."

Pauline Tokmakoff was becoming very impatient. That vile design of hers against Nina made but little progress. A careful inspection of Nina's books, papers, and so on, when she chanced to be out of the way, failed to help her, or to elicit any suspicious, incriminating facts.

If, when they were conversing together, Pauline led up to the subject of Nihilism, her guest only exhibited complete indifference, as if, for her, the topic lacked all interest.

Had she been mistaken in her conjecture that Nina belonged to the conspirators? Pauline asked herself impatiently. If so, her one hope of procuring the girl's death or banishment, as a preliminary measure to winning Paul Perovsky's love, would vanish, and she had no other scheme with which to replace it.

The confidential clerk came but seldom to his employer's residence. On one of these rare visits, however, he saw Nina Koecher, and felt some surprise at finding her under Mr. Tokmakoff's roof, actually staying with his daughter as a guest!

Nina and the young Russian had first met under circumstances and conditions to be de-

scribed later on. He had fallen deeply in love with her, although more than once she had assured him kindly, but firmly, that his love could never be returned; that, in all probability, she would live and die unmarried. Notwithstanding, his passion for her remained unabated.

"Nina, you here!" he exclaimed, as they met upon the great staircase one day.

"Yes," she rejoined, with an involuntary smile at the surprise he evinced. "You hardly expected to come across me in such splendid quarters as these! Pauline and I were school-mates once, and she has invited me to stay with her."

"I am glad," said the Russian, his fair, handsome face lighting up. "It is but little pleasure that falls to your share, my poor Nina. Ah, it should be so different if you would only—"

"I thought we had agreed not to refer to that subject again," she interrupted, gently. "It is so useless, and so painful to us both."

"I will win you yet," he said, doggedly. "I am not easily discouraged, Nina. Meanwhile, let me advise caution while you remain in this house. Tokmakoff is effectively loyal."

"So am I—to my country's best interests," was the quiet reply, as Nina proceeded on her way upstairs.

"You know Mr. Perovsky, then?" remarked Pauline, lightly, linking her arm in that of her guest.

She had witnessed the encounter from an upper landing, without being able to detect the words interchanged.

"Yes, a little," said the girl.

"How odd! Where did you first meet him?"

"At a party some time ago."

"What do you think of him?" asked Pauline, abruptly, scanning Nina's face closely as she spoke. "Is he not handsome enough for any woman to fall in love with him?"

"He is handsome, certainly," said Nina; "but I, for one, should never fall in love with him, although he is the sort of man one would like to retain as a friend."

Her words had the ring of truth in them. Instead of feeling relieved, however, on this account Pauline's fury against her unconscious rival increased. The precious gift that she, Pauline, craved had been laid at Nina's feet, only to be spurned. It was monstrous. More than ever after such an admission she sought to compass the girl's ruin.

Pauline could not sleep that night. She tossed restlessly from side to side, her mind full of evil thoughts, and mad, feverish schemes. The door connecting her room with Nina's had been left ajar.

Presently the clocks throughout the vast city struck two. As they did so Nina's voice, raised in short, broken utterances, proceeded from the other room. Pauline sat up in bed, and listened. To whom could she be speaking?

Still the voice went on. Pauline rose, slipped on her dressing-gown, her long hair falling around her, and noiselessly entered Nina's room.

By the faint moonlight that struggled in she discovered Nina fast asleep, one white hand lying outside the silken coverlet, the short boyish waves of golden hair tossed lightly about on the lace-edged pillow.

A thrill of fierce exultation swept through Pauline. The girl was talking in her sleep. Now or never was the time to discover whether she had any dangerous secrets or not.

Bending over her like a pale, dark-eyed Nemesis, Pauline listened eagerly to her mutterings. At first they were disappointing; they related only to her vocation as a teacher, the incidents of her daily life. Pauline was turning away in disgust when the little white hand moved restlessly. Nina spoke again in heightened tone, with feverish energy.

"At midnight, a fortnight hence, in the old house by the riverside. I shall be there to give an account of my own work, and how I

have sped in the mission intrusted to me. The pass word—has it been altered?—secrecy, caution, yes, yes, we need them—the brethren carry their lives in their hands. Yet even those hell-hounds, the police, are not likely to break in upon our meeting there. The iron door would offer a stout resistance if they did. 'Are you a Nihilist?' he said. 'Thank Heaven, that gave me courage to answer, I am!'

Her voice sank again into unintelligible, disconnected utterances. Pauline crept back stealthily to her own room, an expression of vindictive joy upon her face. At last she had triumphed. Nina's life and liberty were at the disposal of her enemy.

The next morning, without consulting her father, Pauline despatched a note to the head of the police in St. Petersburg; while, as a fresh proof of her liking and friendship for Nina, she presented the unsuspecting girl with a handsome silk dress.

#### CHAPTER IV.

NINA KOECHER, regarding herself as an obscure and insignificant mortal—a mere tool with which to work out a mighty purpose—would have been greatly surprised had anyone chanced to inform her that she possessed two dangerous enemies, each bent upon getting her out of the way as speedily as possible, in order to further their respective interests, which her existence served to retard.

Yet such was actually the case. Pauline Tokmakoff hated her as a rival, and sought to remove her by unfair means, and treachery disguised under the cloak of friendship. Ivan Tolstoi, the money-lender, had also his reasons for wishing to be rid of Nina ere the time came round when he would be required to give an account of the sum of money originally placed in his hands by her father.

Ivan was a dwarfish, ill-made man of fifty, with bright sunken eyes, long ragged hair and beard, and claw-like, dirt-grimed fingers. He dressed shabbily, and conducted his business as a money-lender in a small dingy office situated in one of the busiest parts of St. Petersburg. Here he sat all day, like a spider in his web, waiting for victims. Latterly they had been few and far between however; he had lost a large sum of money through unfortunate speculations. Rain stared him in the face; while, what rendered him most uneasy, was that sum intrusted to him years ago by Nina's father, as a provision for her later on.

That money had long since been swallowed up in Ivan's unlucky speculations; a fact he regretted less on Nina's account than his own. In a year or so the girl could demand it, and he would be unable to meet her claim upon him; his villainy would be unmasked.

Ivan's mind was as deformed as his body. Strange as it may sound, he hated Nina in proportion to the harm he had done her. He knew that she was prejudiced against him because he had persistently refused to advance her the smallest amount of money in her hour of need. As soon as she could legally claim her own she would do so, refusing, in turn, to listen to any plea or excuse which he might put forward to gain time. Ivan gnashed his yellow teeth as he brooded over his unenviable position. How best to avert exposure and punishment with regard to the money appropriated occupied his thoughts night and day.

If he could but get rid of Nina quietly, in other words, compass her death, he would be safe. And this, if attempted, must be done promptly. Nina's disappearance later on, just as her little fortune became due, might give rise to suspicion. A girl, a friendless, obscure creature, surely a clever, unscrupulous man ought to find it easy to get rid of her. Ivan racked his brains for weeks over the problem to no purpose. Then an idea darted into his mind as he sat gnawing his long fingernails, and with a fiendish grin, a sudden exclamation of delight and satisfaction, he decided to put it into practice at once.

The remarkable feature connected with Nina's two enemies was the absence of any collusion between them. Ivan Tolstoi was unaware of Pauline Tokmakoff's schemes and *vice versa*. They were both bearing down upon Nina from different directions; both bent upon her destruction, while profoundly ignorant of each other's intentions arising from motives so widely divergent.

John Marlowe, unconscious of the double danger overhanging the girl he loved, looked forward eagerly to his next meeting with her. It seemed an age in coming. By this time he had given up self-deception and plausible excuses about friendship and so on to account for the strong attraction that drew him towards her. He knew himself to be hopelessly in love with the beautiful Russian girl.

John Marlowe was his own master, free to take a wife where and when he pleased. Would Nina consent to marry him, to give up those venal schemes of hers, those lofty, patriotic aims, and return with him to England, to lead a quiet domestic life there? That was really the question.

The young man became somewhat *distract*. M. Gustave Vandrey rallied him upon his dullness and absence of mind.

"I hope you have not lost your heart to that pretty girl whose dog you carried home for her a little while ago, *mon garçon*?" said the Frenchman, airily. "It would be so like a woman to reward a service rendered by a young and good-looking man in that way!"

"She is a sweet girl!" retorted John Marlowe, defiantly. "A man might well be excused if he did fall in love with her."

"Ah! sweet enough," given with a shrug, "but sweets are cloying. Woman is a nice dish, especially when well dressed, *enfin*. A little of her, in my opinion, goes a long way."

John Marlowe laughed at the elderly gourmet's apt allusion to his favourite theme.

"She has not disagreed with me yet," he said, carelessly, aware that M. Vandrey was hardly the sort of man to listen with much patience or sympathy to a love-story. Had it been the drawing-up of a *menu*, now, his attention and interest would at once have been secured.

"Have a care, *mon ami*!" rejoined the cautious Frenchman. "This is the land of political intrigue, and one never knows where the next mine is going to explode, or how. Take my advice, and do nothing calculated to compromise yourself while you remain in St. Petersburg. For aught you know to the contrary, your pretty friend may be an ardent Nihilist, bent upon effecting your conversion."

John Marlowe adroitly changed the subject. What would M. Vandrey say if aware that, while cognisant of her Nihilistic propensities, he had yet fallen deeply in love with Nina?

The Englishman was the first to arrive at the trysting place in the park on the day agreed upon. Nina did not keep him waiting long. He thought her more lovely than ever as she returned his greeting. The cold, repellent expression had given place to one gentler and almost beseeching, the blue eyes had gained in softness and depth. Love had wrought an unconscious transformation in the girl, compelling her to read her own heart for the first time, to yield to the new and tender feelings it aroused—feelings so alien to all else in her strange, sad life.

"Nina," said young Marlowe, abruptly, when, after walking about for a while, they sat down to rest; "I find that I have made a mistake."

"A mistake? How?" she asked, in some bewilderment.

"In deeming that it was possible for us to be friends."

As he uttered these words the anguish in her eyes startled while it delighted him.

"You have been thinking it over in the interim," she said, slowly, striving to conceal her pain, "and you find the risk too great—the risk of knowing me. Did I not tell you so at first, and —"

"Nay, you misconstrue my meaning, Nina," he interrupted, earnestly, loth to continue the torture, since the experiment had already proved successful in convincing him that he was sure of her love. "We cannot remain friends, my darling, because nothing but a nearer and dearer tie between us can ever satisfy me. We must be lovers, and, later on, Nina, you will consent to marry me. Is it not so?"

The delicate colour ebbed back to her face again; a look of wondrous happiness and astonishment stole across it like a sunbeam, a sob rose to her throat.

"Is it possible that you care so much for me—that you would even make me your wife?" she asked, softly, yet with an incredulous air.

"Yes, Nina, you will not render me miserable by refusing?"

"Oh! I don't know," she exclaimed, brokenly; "think of my position—and yours, of the barrier that divides us. I had never thought of joy like this being in store for me; my life has been such an unhappy one hitherto. With all your advantages you ought to marry so differently it seems."

"I think you may safely leave me to look after my own interests," he said, with a smile. "Nina, tell me plainly, do you love me or not?"

"You have become like a second life to me," she said, in low, fervid tones. "Why should I conceal the truth from you? I would gladly die to save you from pain or injury. I have treasured up each word and look of yours in my memory since we first met. Yet, were I to become your wife, I might ruin your prospects—that would be horrible!"

"My prospects are already assured," he replied, with the easy confidence of a prosperous man, "so your scruples are unnecessary. Darling! you have made me very happy by this confession of love. Ours must be a short engagement. As soon as we are married I shall take you away from St. Petersburg and the distressing associations connected with it. Once in England a new and a far happier life will open out before you."

She shivered involuntarily.

"You forget," she murmured. "I am not a free agent. I owe duty and allegiance to the cause with which I have identified myself."

John Marlowe frowned.

"Nina, I have but one request to make," he said imperiously. "I ask you to sever your connection with the Nihilists, or at least to take no active part in their projects for the future. Since you love me you will not find it hard to comply. My wife must not be engaged in plotting or carrying out conspiracies. The idea is so thoroughly un-English."

The beautiful lips quivered, the blue eyes met his beseechingly. Already a struggle had commenced in the girl's heart between love and duty.

"I cannot prove false to the trust reposed in me," she replied firmly, "to the aims and work which, until I met you, were all in all to me. Of my own free-will and desire I become a Nihilist. Would it be right to abandon my brethren now, to lose all interest in the results they are striving to compass, simply because I am very happy in your love, able to gain ease and prosperity by becoming your wife? No. The bitter wrongs of others, my parents' untimely end, are not so lightly to be ignored. To the end of the chapter, however cruel the price of my allegiance, I must remain a Nihilist."

"You will not refuse to quit Russia when once we are married, though?" he urged. Away from Russian influences he thought it might prove easy to convert her.

"No, I would work for my country here or elsewhere," she rejoined, grateful to him for bearing with her so patiently. "I should never bring the subject under your notice, since you dislike it, or court publicity as a Nihilist. In so far as I can your wishes shall



be deferred to in this matter—and in all others I promise to obey unconditionally."

He drew her towards him in that retired spot and kissed her fondly. He would have been better pleased had she promised to break with the Nihilists altogether, yet her very fidelity, he told himself, betokened a noble nature; and once fairly settled in England that confounded nonsense which filled her pretty head would die out by degrees, leaving her entirely his own.

"And when are we to be received?" he asked.

"Not yet," she said, with a blush. "What an impulsive being you are!"

"I will wait a month for my bride—and no longer," he rejoined.

"Are all Englishmen so masterful, pray?"

"Well, we're uncommonly fond of having our own way, and we generally contrive to get it. In the present instance I will not brook disappointment."

"I will be ready—a month hence," said Nina, her voice tremulous from very happiness; "and Cossack?"

"Will form the third member of our family, of course. I can never thank him sufficiently for having led to an introduction between us."

"It is all so sudden, so wonderful," she went on, "it bewilders me. I cannot realise my own good fortune as yet. I was such an unhappy girl when you crossed my path, John. Sorrow and suffering had been my constant companions from childhood. I had grown hard and bitter beneath their influence; they stood between me and all the joys of youth. Then you came, and let a flood of light in upon my life. I felt what it was to be young and to love; the rapture and the beauty of existence dawned suddenly upon me. But for you I should never have emerged from the shade into the dazzling sunshine. It was your hand, beloved, that led me forth."

"If I can help it, you shall never return to the shade," he said, tenderly, regarding her with a glance of loving possession.

Ah! how pleasant it seemed to be pledged to that strong, handsome, devoted man, to reflect that from henceforth her place would be at his side!

Nina did not take Pauline Tokmakoff into her confidence with regard to the projected marriage. Friendly as Pauline professed to be, there was something about her that placed the other girl instinctively on her guard.

Aware that a storm might break over her head any day, should the Nihilists be arrested, she wished her marriage to remain a secret, until it had really taken place, and this out of consideration for her lover. Once married, she would be able to enjoy a feeling of greater security.

Environed as she was by danger, all things seemed more or less uncertain to Nina. She trembled lest the prospective happiness of such an union should be denied to her after all. She abridged her stay with Pauline, inventing some excuse for leaving her ere the fortnight had elapsed.

After some feigned remonstrances and regrets, Pauline allowed her to go. She fathomed Nina's motives easily thus far. In order to attend the midnight gathering of Nihilists, to which she had alluded in her sleep, she must needs be at her own lodgings since she could not quit the Tokmakoff mansion at that hour without exciting comment and suspicion.

Pauline, aware that the net was woven closely around her unsuspecting rival, felt no anxiety in thus losing sight of her.

Another day and Nina would be in prison, a detected Nihilist, awaiting her sentence. Then perhaps Paul Perovsky would discover what a mistake he had made in losing his heart to her.

Nina, seated in her poorly furnished room, was busy with her needle, making up her wedding dress, when the woman of the house came in with a note which had just been left at the door for her.

Not without surprise and curiosity—her correspondents being so few and far between—

Nina opened it. The note consisted of four lines only.

"If Nina Koecher would hear of something greatly to her advantage let her come, alone, to the above address at six o'clock this evening, bringing the note with her."

There was no signature attached to this singular epistle, and the address mentioned was in the outskirts of St. Petersburg. From whom could it have emanated?

After a little reflection, Nina decided to answer it in person, as requested. Six o'clock was the time specified, and at midnight the Nihilist meeting would take place. She must not on any account fail to put in an appearance there, yet she would just be able to keep both appointments by starting at once.

Telling Cossack, who was still lame from the effects of his accident to stay behind, she put on her things and went out, revolving in her mind as she went what the mysterious "something to her advantage" could consist of.

The dog, however, loth to be parted from his mistress, crept down after her, and followed at a little distance, unperceived by Nina. Brave as she was, the girl felt some apprehension upon nearing the house mentioned in the note.

It stood by itself on a lonely stretch of road between the city, surrounded on all sides by high walls, grim, frowning, desolate; and, to all appearance, uninhabited. As she looked at it Nina decided not to enter the house but to have the interview take place at the gate.

Someone must have been on the look-out for her. She had scarcely rung ere the massive gate was cautiously opened by an old woman, who invited her to enter.

"Good mother, I would speak with the writer of this note," she said, producing it as she stood upon the threshold.

"I am deaf, speak louder," said the crone, "or come closer."

Incautiously advancing a step or two Nina uttered a cry as the gate was banged violently behind her—a cry instantly stifled by a thick cloth thrown over her head, and drawn so tight as almost to suffocate her. In spite of her frantic struggles she was dragged forward in the direction of the house by a man's strong, relentless hand. She felt the change of atmosphere as they entered the house, and descended a long flight of steps; here the air became damp and earthy.

Suddenly she was thrust down two more steps, the brutal hold on her relaxed; she heard the grating of a key in a lock, and the sound of mocking laughter—then she was alone.

Freeing her head from the folds of the cloth Nina glanced wildly around. She was in a cellar, dug out of the solid earth, a kind of living tomb, into which a faint light streamed through an aperture over the door.

The girl's heart sank within her—fear paralyzed every faculty. What horrible fate could be in store for her? In that harsh, mocking laughter she had recognised the voice of Ivan Tolstoi, the money-lender.

## CHAPTER V.

It was midnight, and a number of men and women were making their way singly, and at intervals, by many devious routes towards an old ruinous four-storied house, the back premises of which overhung the river Neva. As they entered the janitor in charge of the door challenged them severally, receiving the pass-word in return. This outer door was of oak, studded with iron nails, sturdy enough to resist a prolonged attack upon it from without.

At the head of the first flight of stairs was another door, iron-plated, with a grated orifice in it. After being surveyed through this orifice the Nihilists were admitted into the large room behind it, where the business of the night was to be conducted.

The room was scantily furnished with chairs, tables, and benches. In one corner of it stood a printing-press; in another fitted up for the

purpose, a young man was engaged in despatching and receiving telegraphic messages. Books, papers, and writing materials were scattered up and down the tables, around which the men and women present began to seat themselves.

They differed widely in age, class, and personal appearance. There were young girls, fair to look upon, and youths in the first flush of manhood; men and women in the prime of life; others, again, grey and careworn, veterans in the sublime struggle for freedom. Thoughtful students, doctors, lawyers, men of rank, wealth, and intellect rubbed shoulders with the peasant, clad in felt boots, frock gathered in at the waist, and greasy sheepskin gloves.

The woman of culture and refinement sat next to her working sister; rich and poor fraternised together, having one common object set before them, which each was pledged to advance and further at any cost.

A certain calm determination, an invincible resolve, distinguished all present, as they settled themselves to discuss the business of the night. Yet but little enthusiasm or strong feeling found vent in words. Their cause had, as it were, become a vital part of themselves, needing no surface stimulus to keep them faithful to it.

This was one of the centres of Nihilism. Here the tracts and pamphlets to be distributed throughout the country were printed, and the most important business transacted. Here some of the daring deeds destined to startle Europe were planned. From this room radiated out commands and instructions that kept the vast system in working order.

As yet it had escaped a visit from the police; the utmost precautions being taken to prevent the comings and goings of the members from attracting attention, while the house itself offered especial facilities for escape in the event of a police raid.

"Nina Koecher is not here," said the stalwart, iron-grey man who sat at the head of the table, "yet she was duly apprised of the meeting."

"She may arrive yet," replied a young man, who had not spoken until now. "Something has happened to detain her. She was never late before. She told me only yesterday when I met her that she should be here."

"Those papers entrusted to her for transmission," went on the first speaker, "were of great importance. Should—"

His sentence was never finished. A noise as of distant thunder coming from below smote suddenly upon the ears of those assembled, mingled with the roar of many voices.

Men and women alike sprang to their feet simultaneously, with pale but resolute faces. For a second they stood there breathlessly confronting each other.

"The police are upon us," said the iron-grey man, breaking the awful silence. "We have no time to lose!"

Going towards a large bureau he took from it papers containing the names of members and other valuable information. These he quickly secreted about his person, his coolness being reflected in the others present.

Not the youngest girl betrayed any sign of fear. The calm, defiant courage displayed had something awe-inspiring about it under the circumstances.

"To the boats!" said their leader, as he lowered the gas. "Our only hope of escape lies in that direction. Ah, thunder away!" as the knocking below grew louder; "that door is not easily to be forced, my friends!"

In a body they descended the staircase to a room at the back of the house, overlooking the river. Here two boats were always moored, previous to a conference, to expedite escape should a surprise take place, and their retreat be cut off in front.

An ejaculation broke from the lips of the men present as they threw up the window on the ground-floor and peered out into the darkness. Close below them ran the river, but the boats were no longer there.

The ropes fastening them to iron staples in the wall had been cut, and the boats removed, thus rendering escape impossible. The women said nothing.

"They have done their work thoroughly this time," said a student. "It only remains to offer a stout resistance, and sell our lives as dearly as possible."

"Thank Heaven for Nina's absence!" murmured the young fellow, who had spoken in her defence just now, beneath his breath.

The doomed band of men and women returned to the room on the first floor, closing and barring the iron-plated door after them, while an iron shutter slid down to protect the grating.

Turning up the gas, the men examined their weapons, then proceeded to destroy the papers which they had previously attempted to save. In a few seconds the incriminating evidence was reduced to a mass of tinder; telegraphic messages, describing the strait they were in, and warning the other centres against surprise, flashed away in various directions, the operator's hand scarcely trembling as he worked the instrument.

And all this time the noise below was increasing; the roar of a great crowd penetrated even to that silent room overlooking the river.

"The door will not hold out much longer," said the iron-grey man, calmly, pausing in the act of dictating a message. "The hounds will soon have their fangs in our throat. Courage, my brethren; we can but die once, and the cause is a noble one!"

"It is!" replied all the voices at once. Then, as a great crash was heard, followed by a trampling of many feet up the staircase, the women clasped each others' hands.

"Surrender, in the name of the Czar!" cried a hoarse voice on the other side of the iron-plated door.

No reply was given to this invitation beyond an electric charge sent into the iron door. Some cries were heard by those within, interspersed with oaths. Then the besiegers brought their heavy hammers to bear upon the door. The telegraph operator, having finished his despatches, with one blow from a huge mallet destroyed the instrument, rendering it useless.

Finding the door slow to yield, the police-officer in command of the party gave orders to set fire to the woodwork all round it. Being old and dry it caught quickly. Stifling smoke and flashes of flame found their way into the room. Presently the great door tottered, swayed, and, deprived of its supports, fell heavily forwards into the room; trampling over it, amidst smoke and flame and bullets aimed at them by the Nihilists, came the Russian police.

The struggle was short but sharp while it lasted. One of the police fell dead, several were injured. A student, losing nerve, pointed his revolver at his head, and shot himself to avoid being taken. The remainder were disarmed and secured before being driven downstairs with blows and oaths on their way to prison by their captors. The immense crowd gathered outside the house saw them brought forth without making any demonstration. Whatever their sympathies might be the iron hand of authority cowed them into remaining strictly neutral. The Nihilists, surrounded by the police, quickly vanished from sight.

"Fools!" said a sneering voice, as the crowd began to disperse.

"No, martyrs!" was the reply, in deep resonant tones that thrilled the hearts of all who heard them.

Pauline Tokmakoff paced restlessly to and fro her boudoir the next morning in a state of intolerable suspense. She longed to know what had transpired on the previous night—if Nina Koecher were really in prison; yet she dared not make any direct inquiries lest her own share in the transaction, her previous knowledge of the police raid upon the Nihilists meditated, should stand revealed.

Thanks to Pauline's information the police

had succeeded in discovering the house by the river alluded to by Nina in her fever-haunted sleep. Ere the hour appointed for the meeting of the brotherhood had arrived their plans were fully matured, and the official net securely thrown around the unsuspecting victims. Even the possibility of the Nihilists escaping by way of the river had been foreseen and guarded against. A more successful raid had seldom been planned.

Pauline, waiting impatiently for tidings, experienced no remorse at the treacherous part she had played. Her sympathies were not with the Nihilists. Indeed, apart from her own personal affairs, she could scarcely be said to possess sympathies of any kind. Nina Koecher once executed or banished to Siberia, Paul Perovsky would surely cease to care for her; he would no longer remain indifferent to the signs of favour lavished freely upon him by his employer's only daughter. Nina's influence over him gone, he would be willing to reciprocate Pauline's love.

Isaac Tokmakoff would doubtless be averse to a marriage between his daughter and heiress and his confidential clerk, when it was first broached. But Pauline, accustomed to the utmost indulgence from her father, relied upon her persuasive powers to bring him round to her own point of view in time. Rather than slight her happiness the merchant, finding remonstrance vain, would take the young Russian into partnership with him, and thus render the subsequent marriage less unconventional.

With the man she loved so recklessly as her husband, with wealth to smooth the path before them, and remove all obstacles from it, life would indeed be radiant with delight, reflected Pauline; one long round of passionate bliss. As for Nina, bah! The little pale thing had stood in her way, and she was not in the habit of being thwarted.

"It will grieve Paul at first to hear of her arrest," she mused, not without a jealous pang; "but the feeling will pass. A loyal Russian would not dare openly to identify himself with a detected Nihilist. Ere long I shall find means to console him, my one, my only love, and then—"

Her reverie was interrupted by her father. Isaac Tokmakoff, a big, stout, heavily-bearded, elderly man, with typical Russian features, entered his daughter's boudoir like a whirlwind, his pale face expressive of rage and terror.

"Papa, what is the matter?" cried Pauline, going up to him. "Are you ill?"

"Ill, no; it is worse only that," he exclaimed, fiercely. "Pauline, a great calamity has befallen us; the news of it has just been brought to me by a police officer."

"Ah!"

"Last night, in consequence of information received from a private source, a successful raid was made upon those cursed Nihilists," he went on. "Among the prisoners is one whom you have met under this roof—one intimately known to us. In turn, I shall be suspected, I, the Czar's most loyal subject, thanks to the connection with this malcontent."

The big man positively shook with fear as he spoke. After all his abject deference to authority it was terrible that shame and suspicion should be directed towards him through the defalcation of another with whom he had long held daily intercourse.

Pauline, confident that her father's words related to Nina Koecher, drew a long breath of relief. Her scheme had been perfectly successful then, while the merchant's fears—if he only knew it—were groundless, seeing that the information leading to the arrest had emanated from his daughter. Authority would be far more likely to reward than to punish the Tokmakoffs, come to that.

"Do you mean Nina Koecher, my school-friend, papa?" she cried, with well-simulated sorrow and surprise. "Can it be that she is a Nihilist?"

"Nina Koecher!" repeated Isaac, impa-

tiently. "That girl you had staying here with you recently? No, she is not implicated that I am aware of. I allude to some one of far more importance. Paul Perovsky, my confidential clerk, was arrested last night among others as a Nihilist, and conveyed to the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. Of course, as his employer—"

"What!" interrupted Pauline, hoarsely, her features convulsed, her eyes well-nigh starting from her head. "He a Nihilist—present at the meeting held last night? And Nina Koecher?"

"Was not there. I know nothing of her. How you harp upon that girl's name, Pauline," said the merchant, fretfully. "I wish to Heaven that I had never engaged Perovsky! I—Pauline, my child, this has proved too much for you!"

"I have killed him!" moaned the unhappy woman as, with a low cry, she sank senseless at her father's feet.

They carried her to her room, where she lay for weeks struggling between life and death, a victim to the most poignant remorse—remorse unredeemed by any gleam of hope or repentance!

Her intended victim had, in some inscrutable way, escaped the snare set for her. Her treacherous, unwomanly conduct had only resulted in the arrest and disgrace of the man she loved and sought to marry; the man for whom she would have died sooner than injure or betray him willfully.

No suspicion that Perovsky was a Nihilist had ever crossed Pauline's mind. The blow fell upon her with unbroken force when it came, and she had only herself to thank for the ensuing misery and desolation, the bitter, unavailing self-reproach that tortured her by day and night.

Isaac Tokmakoff, learning the pitiful story from his daughter's lips—she had no longer any interest in concealing it from him—forebore to reproach her, anxious and unhappy as it had made him.

For one thing, she was his own flesh and blood, badly as she had acted; for another, Pauline's misery and punishment were too evident for him to seek to add anything to either.

"What will they do to Paul?" was the question ever upon her lips, a question to which her father could give no reply.

He feared the worst for the young man, now in prison awaiting his trial with the other Nihilists.

She pictured him, the handsome, intellectual, cultured young Russian, being starved or tortured by his brutal, unfeeling guards, and this was her doing; he owed it all to her. Later on the knout, or the miseries of the march to Siberia, might be in store for him, unless death came to terminate his sufferings. She spared herself no pang that imagination could produce. Paul's sufferings, the result of her machinations, haunted her perpetually. Selfish, hard, as she was to others, she would yet gladly, thankfully, have exchanged places with him, had it been possible.

Meanwhile John Marlowe was becoming more and more uneasy about Nina. The reported arrest of Nihilists had alarmed him greatly. Hurriedly running down the list of names published he had felt unspeakably thankful that hers was not among the number. His next impulse was to call at her lodging, and implore her to exercise great caution.

Upon going to the house, Nina's landlady informed him that the girl had gone out on the afternoon of the previous day; nothing had been seen or heard of her since. John Marlowe's fears returned. Could Nina be among those unhappy prisoners in the grim fortress after all?

Half distracted he made his way to Isaac Tokmakoff's house, where Nina had, he knew, stayed recently, and asked if she were there. Being answered in the negative and further informed that Pauline Tokmakoff was too ill to see him, he spent the rest of the day in



roaming about St. Petersburg, trying to collect fresh information about the prisoners.

Early the next morning he presented himself again at Nina's lodging; the girl was still absent. John Marlowe, unable to account for her strange disappearance, asked permission to go upstairs to her room.

And there he glanced eagerly around in search of note or letter that might throw some light upon her absence—all in vain. Then he timidly lifted the lid of the great wooden chest. What he saw there brought the unwonted tears to his eyes—Nina's unfinished wedding-dress, neatly folded, lay at the top.

"My poor darling!" exclaimed the young Englishman, hoarsely, "what evil fate can have befallen her? I swear to unravel the mystery sooner or later! If —" He paused and listened intently. A sound was heard upon the staircase. In another moment Cossack, lame, footsore, dusty, and half-starved, entered the room, and, with a joyous bark of recognition, fawned at the young man's feet.

## CHAPTER VI.

"COSSACK, good old fellow, where is your mistress?" said John Marlowe, eagerly, as he patted the hound, hoping against hope that Nina might be close behind her favourite.

Cossack only lifted his great intelligent brown eyes and whined. He had evidently walked a long distance; he seemed too much fatigued to drag himself across the floor.

Going downstairs the young man produced a well-filled purse and requested the landlady to supply him with food for the dog. She readily complied, while asking a string of questions about Nina, whose long absence had rendered her both curious and uneasy.

Escaping as quickly as possible John Marlowe returned to Cossack. The poor brute ate and drank ravenously. Then as soon as his appetite was satisfied, he made towards the door, looking wistfully back as if in expectation that Marlowe would follow him.

This was precisely what the Englishman had hoped for. His only chance of finding Nina lay through the dog. Cossack was evidently acquainted with her present whereabouts, and desirous of taking him there.

A dress belonging to Nina hung behind the door. To make his meaning plain Marlowe took it down, and held it to the dog.

"Find her Cossack, old man, find your mistress!" he said, encouragingly; and Cossack, heedless of his footsore condition, with a short, sharp bark of delight, led the way downstairs.

Once in the streets Marlowe found it difficult to keep up with the dog, he went at such a pace, threading his way in and out the maze of thoroughfares with a confidence that betokened a thorough knowledge of his destination. Marlowe, his attention centred upon Cossack, failed to see M. Gustave Vaudrey on the way to his club, until that genial Frenchman pulled him up.

"Whither away with such a gaunt companion at such a pace, *mon cher*?" he demanded. "Are you racing him for a wager?"

Cossack, impatient of delay, waited uneasily at a little distance.

Until now it had not occurred to John Marlowe to seek assistance in his search after Nina. It came into his mind now to invoke the Frenchman's aid; it might be needed, and M. Vaudrey had plenty of courage.

In a few hurried words he explained the circumstances under which Nina had disappeared, and requested M. Vaudrey to turn back and accompany him wherever the dog might lead.

"How is it that you, *mon enfant*, are so well acquainted with this young lady's movements, so deeply interested in her abrupt disappearance?" asked M. Vaudrey, with a disappearing shake of his head. "Did I not warn you?"

"I have asked Nina Koecher to become my

wife! We are to be married in less than a month hence," said John Marlowe, sternly. "Now you can understand why her strange, inexplicable absence is driving me half-mad. My fear is that she has met with foul play."

"I may regret your impetuosity in forming such a connection," said M. Vaudrey. "At the same time I am at your service. *Allons*, let us set out like two knights of old to rescue beauty in distress, with the dog as our guide."

"I shall not forget this friendly act on your part," rejoined Marlowe, as the two men walked along side by side, Cossack still leading the way. "The dog, who had gone out with his mistress the day before yesterday, returned alone to her lodging an hour ago, footsore and half-starved. He is on her track now. Heaven grant that we may find her still alive!"

"It is to be hoped," said M. Vaudrey, who beneath a great deal of superficial selfishness owned a kind heart, "that Mdlle. Koecher is not involved with the Nihilists now under arrest. Her disappearance would seem to be almost identical with their capture. If so —"

"I have made inquiries," interposed Marlowe, "and I cannot ascertain that she is among the prisoners."

"Is that dog going on for ever?" asked the Frenchman, after an hour's stiff walking, thinking ruefully of the delicious little luncheon, with *Pigeon de Bordeaux au Cresson*, which he had sacrificed in order to accompany Marlowe. "We have left St. Petersburg behind already."

"I am confident that he is guiding us aright," said Marlowe. "He has not once hesitated as to the way that he should take."

"Oh youth, and love, and folly!" thought his companion, "what fools you make of us! And that I, Gustave Vaudrey, a man of sense, should have been induced to participate in such a wild-goose chase! *Tonnerre*, what will the Englishman say or do should he find his goddess—whom he deems to be in such peril—merely carrying on an intrigue with another lover? The situation in that case will be worth studying, yet—for the sake of this well-meaning young fool—I would rather be disappointed of the situation."

"What a lonely place!" remarked John Marlowe, as they approached the house to which Nina had been enticed; then, as Cossack paused in front of the garden-door, and began to scratch away the earth with his feet, whining all the time he exclaimed, "M. Vaudrey, do you see that? She is *here*! The dog will go no further!"

"The house appears to be untenanted," said the Frenchman, after ringing the bell to no purpose, a keener interest in the adventure taking hold of him as the mystery thickened. "M. Marlowe, what are you doing?"

John Marlowe was examining the ground for some distance around the house in a stooping attitude. The soil was soft, and he had found in it the impress of a small, well-made boot, which he conjectured to be Nina's.

"Look!" he cried, hoarsely, grasping his companion by the arm, "I have traced those footprints, made by a woman's boot, to the house, but I can find none going in the opposite direction. The dog has evidently wandered round the walls many times, his footprints are to be seen everywhere—he was not admitted with his mistress. Oh! my darling, what has befallen you within that cursed house?"

"Control yourself," said M. Vaudrey, as he beckoned to some peasants passing at a distance. "My good fellows," addressing the men, "this gentleman and I have every reason to believe that a young lady has been forcibly abducted and brought to this house, where she is a prisoner. We require a ladder with which to scale the wall. Can some of you obtain one? You shall be well rewarded for your trouble."

Two of the peasants started off in search of a ladder, the remainder, out of curiosity, stayed with Marlowe and M. Vaudrey.

In ten minutes the ladder arrived, also a fresh contingent of curious lookers-on, whom

the rumour had drawn together, even in that secluded spot.

Marlowe placed the ladder against the wall and went up it, carrying the dog in his arms. Once at the top he drew it up with assistance and planted it on the other side. Fairly landed in the large neglected garden he undid the massive bolts and admitted the others, Cossack bounding on in front up the steps leading to the door of the house.

Marlowe knocked and rang repeatedly, meeting with no response, however. The same echoed throughout the house, confirming his previous impression that it was empty.

"We must break the door in," he said, tersely. "I will accept all responsibility in the matter."

For a while the door resisted the efforts of half-a-dozen men brought to bear upon it; then it slowly yielded. Entering, Marlowe saw a large hall with rooms opening out of it on either side. These rooms, with one exception, were bare of furniture, a few chairs and a table forming the exception.

"Where are the occupants, if any?" asked M. Vaudrey, looking round.

While hesitating whether to go upstairs or down Cossack settled the matter for them. After scenting around the hall for a few seconds the dog bolted down a dark flight of stairs, barking furiously. Marlowe and the rest followed him, their fears on the increase. Was it merely the dead body of the girl they were about to discover? Had a crime been committed in that gloomy house? Marlowe, beside himself, half frantic with dread, was the first to enter the long, low, earthy-smelling passage containing only a borrowed light, through which the dog had disappeared.

Presently he came up with Cossack. The dog had halted in front of a cellar door, whining, barking, and scratching with his forepaws.

"Nina, Nina!" shouted John Marlowe, in tones of agonised entreaty, putting his broad shoulder to the door which refused to yield. "Are you within?"

Then, thrilling through him with electric power, faint and weak, but distinct, sounded the clear voice he had despaired of ever hearing again.

"I am here!"

Relieved from his horrible suspense, unspeakably relieved and thankful, John Marlowe staggered backwards, momentarily overcome.

"Thank Heaven, she is alive!" he murmured; then, recovering himself, set to work like a giant to aid the others in rescuing her.

"Stand aside, Nina!" he said. "We are going to burst the door in."

It gave way so suddenly at last as to send two of the rescuers rolling over into the cellar beyond. Peering through the gloom Marlowe descried the girl he loved supporting herself against the damp wall. Another moment, and his arms were around her, his lips were raining kisses upon her pale-drawn face.

"Nina, darling, look up! you are saved! Tell me what villain led to your being imprisoned here?" said the impetuous young man, but no reply came from those pallid lips—Nina had fainted.

They carried her upstairs, and procured some water.

As she slowly revived, a burst of hysterical weeping relieved the overwrought nerves.

With her head pillowed upon her lover's breast, Nina, by degrees, made him aware of the ruse employed to bring her to the house.

"Does Mdlle. know what became of that note?" inquired M. Vaudrey.

"It was taken from me," said Nina, feebly. "But I am sure the voice of the man who overpowered and dragged me into the cellar was that of Ivan Tolstoi, the money-lender. I recognised it at once."

"And this man has money of yours in his hands?"

"Yes; money which he would soon be called upon to account for, and which he may have dishonestly speculated with and lost. It

is very probable. I have always mistrusted him. It seemed clear enough to me, as I thought it out in that dreadful place, in darkness and solitude. Having disposed of my money, he sought to compass my death!"

"Devil!" said John Marlowe, passionately. "He shall answer to me for this. Is it possible, then, you have seen no one since you were first locked in the cellar the day before yesterday?"

"No. I fancy that Ivan and the old woman left the house soon after that," replied Nina. "The house was so fearfully still. When I found that no one came to bring me food or water, the horrible truth that they purposed starving me to death forced itself upon my mind. I cannot tell you what I suffered. I called till I was hoarse. Then the thirst became unbearable. I had given up all hope of being rescued when Cossack's bark and your welcome voices broke the stillness. John—dear John! how did you find me?"

"The credit belongs to Cossack," he replied, tenderly smoothing her ruffled curls, while the dog licked her face and hands. "He must have followed you on that day, for he brought us here without the least hesitation, Nina."

And he proceeded to explain the rescue to her, one of the peasants having been despatched to obtain food and restoratives.

"Good old fellow!" said the girl, patting the huge head gratefully. "I was not aware that he had followed me. I told him to remain at home, or I should have indulged more hope of being rescued. Oh, the terrible hours spent in that noisome cellar! It seemed so hard to die—and by such a death—just when life was at its best and brightest! I thought of you, John, and the misery you would suffer—that my fate would always remain a mystery to you. I should have gone mad but for prayer. That soothed and comforted me even then. It was as if, in answer to my cry, an unseen presence came to console and strengthen me. Then you were sent. The value of prayer never came home so strongly to me before."

"After all, we have only the theory of the voice to go upon," said M. Vandrey, who, to his credit, had not once thought of his dinner, "and the law will not convict Ivan Tolstoi upon that. 'Eh, what!' to one of the men who approached him; 'what have you found?'"

"A letter, little father," said the man, "picked up in one of the empty rooms."

Marlowe and M. Vandrey read it without ceremony. It was from one of Ivan Tolstoi's clients, asking him to arrange a loan. A few lines had been pencilled by Ivan himself upon the blank page of the letter.

"This, I fancy, will be sufficient proof that he has been here very recently," remarked M. Vandrey, glancing at the date. "Tolstoi would give a great deal to have this letter in his possession again. Is this house his, I wonder?"

"It may belong to one of his clients over whom he has acquired some pecuniary claim, and from whom he holds it as valuable security," suggested Marlowe; and this was indeed the case, Ivan having a mortgage on the house, which belonged to a non-resident Russian gentleman. The money-lender had selected it as a fit spot for the perpetration of a cold-blooded crime, one in his opinion that would never be found out or traced home to him.

Nina, after partaking of food and wine, went home in a cab, John Marlowe only leaving her at the door of her lodging. Then he proceeded to the nearest police bureau to denounce Ivan Tolstoi, and the old woman, his coadjutrix in crime.

Both, taken completely by surprise, admitted their guilt, Ivan acknowledging the misappropriation also of Nina's money. They were sentenced by the Russian tribunal to imprisonment for life.

Nina had, singularly enough, been preserved

from the enmity of one foe by the still more evil schemes directed against her by another. But for her abduction and enforced absence from the midnight meeting of Nihilists, she would, through Pauline Tokmakoff's agency, have been arrested and sent to prison with her friends, as that young lady desired. Ivan Tolstoi's wickedness had unconsciously checked that of the merchant's daughter, and the object of their plotting had escaped.

The arrest of her friends when she heard of it gave Nina much pain, thankful as she felt for her own narrow escape. The Nihilists' in council, freely absolved her from all blame and suspicion in absenting herself from their meeting on that terrible night when once the story of her abduction became publicly known; and, fortunately for her peace of mind, Nina never became aware that the arrest had taken place in consequence of those words spoken in her sleep. The manner in which the police had come by their information remained a profound mystery, even to the Nihilists themselves.

John Marlowe claimed his bride at the end of the specified month, M. Vandrey acting as best man. The ordering of the wedding breakfast had been left to the genial Frenchman, as a delicate compliment to his talents in that direction. Marlowe, rendered fearful by all that had occurred, wished to leave Russia for England as soon as possible, deeming that his wife, with her Nihilistic sympathies, would be far safer in his native land.

The news of Nina's marriage to the Englishman added fuel to the fire of Pauline's remorse. Had she but waited, and allowed events to develop themselves, Nina would have been removed from her path without crime or treachery. As it was, in her haste to be rid of a rival, she had brought ruin and misery upon the man she loved so madly.

Paul Pervosky was exiled to Siberia; the other Nihilists received sentences more or less severe in character.

After dragging through a few wretched, listless years, Pauline, to everybody's surprise, obtained permission to follow him. Touched by her devotion the exile made her his wife, although it is doubtful whether he would have done so had the past been fully revealed to him. It is only fair to admit that Pauline made him a good wife. Selfish, unprincipled, proud, towards others, her unwavering love for Paul Pervosky formed the redeeming trait in a very faulty character.

Nina and her husband settled down very happily in England, the Russian girl striving hard to adapt herself to her new surroundings in order to give him pleasure and satisfaction. She quickly mastered the English language, and became a favourite among John Marlowe's friends. If she sometimes sends help to her Nihilistic brethren in Russia John winked at the proceeding, since she no longer takes an active part in their deep-laid schemes. Love has conquered the desire for revenge, once paramount in Nina's heart; little children call her mother; and M. Vandrey, when he comes to pay the Marlowes a visit—they keep a good cook, by-the-by—is always a welcome guest!

[THE END.]

CONVERSING WITH FLOWERS. — The young people in Tahiti (an island in the Pacific) have a custom of conversing with flowers, not unlike the Orientals. If a coolness has sprung up between a young pair, the female will separate a flower partially down the centre. One-half of the split flower is intended to represent the man, and the other half the woman, and it is meant typically to imply that, though separate bodies, they are joined together at the heart. If the lover puts the flower in his hair it is a sign that he wishes to preserve her favour; but if he tears it asunder it is a token that he has lost his regard for her, and wishes to be entirely separated.

## FACETIÆ.

The tippler's favourite book—A quarto.

The life of a sultan is a harem-scarem existence at best.

The easiest way to find out a girl's age is to ask some other girl.

CANNIBALS, it is said, will not eat mince-pie. They draw the line at missionary.

OLD BRIDE: "Do you love me, darling?" Young Husband: "I venerate you."

It is a singular fact that all the men employed in a barber's shop are head workmen.

HUSBAND (drunk): "Darling, I've been cricket playing." Wife: "Yes, as usual, on a bat."

GRANDMA: "Yes, Charley, your fiancée is very pretty. I used to look like that when I was fifty."

A MANCHESTER girl is learning to play the cornet, and her admirers speak of her as "the fairest flower that blows."

"Does your husband swear as much as ever?" "Swear! Why, I can't keep a parrot two weeks in the house!"

When a minister mentioned "death on the pale horse" in his sermon, half the men looked around the church for red-headed girls.

FIRST CITIZEN: "What makes you think your neighbour, Towson, is a religious man?" Second Citizen: "He always sifts his ashes on a fast day."

OVERHEARD at a recent wedding: "I say, what thumping cheques some of the brides are getting this autumn." "Yes; but I'd like to see them met."

AN Irishman wrote home to his friends over the briny "that in this blessed land everybody is so honest that a reward has to be offered for thieves."

MATRON: "No, my love, we cannot call on her now. She is on the stage. There is a great gulf between us." Amateur Daughter: "Only the footlights, ma."

LADY (who had a sick husband): "Don't you think, doctor, that you ought to bleed my husband?" Doctor (absent-mindedly): "No, madam, not until he gets well."

"I LOVE to hear the welkin ring," said Cedric, sadly. "It may be so," quoth the Princess de la Swampoodle, placing her tiny hand upon his new overcoat, "but gimme a wedding-ring."

MISS SPINSTER: "Really, Mr. Oldboy, you are so kind!" Mr. Oldboy: "Don't mention it, Miss Spinster. I dance with you, you know, because the others are all too young for a man of my years."

"WHY is it, Clara, that you never play with little Fanny Smith?" Clara: "What is the use of cultivating the society of girls who have no marriageable brothers? It is just time thrown away."

"AND now," asked the presiding elder, in the course of his examination, "are there any crying evils in the congregation?" "Yes," replied the young minister. "Several of the sisters bring quite young babies to church."

A YOUNG woman applied for charity in Buxton, not long since, with a paper containing the following:—"This unfortunate woman is the only daughter of an old and childless father, and she supports several young brothers by her work."

He (making a long call): "What a very odd-looking clock, Miss Smith! Is it an heirloom?" She (suppressing a yawn): "Oh, no! it is a recent purchase of papa's. He has a penchant for such things. I was about to call your attention to it."

"I've found out why we have such a stable government in this country," said Briggs. "It is because we have such an excellent constitution and code of laws, I presume," replied Quinby. "No; that isn't it. It is because so many dark horses get elected to office."



## SOCIETY.

HER MAJESTY was a very successful exhibitor at the Cattle Show, having taken no less than six prizes, of the money value of £150, besides two silver cups. No doubt Her Majesty will be greatly delighted with this Jubilee breeding triumph.

DON ALFONSO XIII. is, says *Modern Society*, quite a wonderful Kinglet. His infant Majesty was exposed, the other day, to an ordeal that few babies of eighteen months old would have undergone so creditably. His mother, who is a clever woman as well as an excellent Queen, thought that it would make an extremely favourable impression for the baby Sovereign to show himself to his faithful Cortes, and she determined that he should do so; whether there were rehearsals or not we cannot say, but when the time came the little King "behaved as sich," and came off with flying colours. The Senate House was crowded to suffocation; gorgeously dressed ladies and brilliantly appraised officers and statesmen thronged up to the very steps of the Throne, and thousands more were sent away disappointed, for there was not room for the multitudes who desired to witness the touching sight of such a babe seated for the first time on his dead father's Throne.

THE Czar and Czarina do not appear to share the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh's passion for frugality. When they left Denmark they placed in the hands of the Municipal authorities a sum of about two thousand pounds, for distribution among the poor of Copenhagen, in remembrance of their agreeable sojourn at the Danish Court, and of the recovery of the Imperial children.

VISCOUNT VALENTOT, the eldest son of the Earl of Mount-Edgcombe, who has just started on a voyage to Australia, is an exceedingly promising scion of the nobility. He is a good shot, a hard rider, and a thorough sportsman. At Oxford, where he spent some time as a member of Christ Church, he was excessively popular, generally speaking, and was much liked by his intimates. His object in undertaking the present tour is to enlarge his mind by a view of Greater England, its people, scenery, and institutions, and by acquiring experience of the New World to fit himself for performing the duties which he will some day be called upon to fulfil.

THE members and relatives of the Hapsburg family are about to present the Emperor of Austria with a costly album, richly studded with precious stones, containing their "life-size" photographs. The Prince Regent of Bavaria, as well as the other German Princes connected with the Imperial family, were taken in the uniforms of their respective Austrian regiments.

BERNSTORFF CASTLE, one of the summer residences of the King and Queen of Denmark, will shortly be considerably enlarged. The Danish Royal family is fond of this castle, which is presently situated at a distance of only about four miles from Copenhagen. When alone the King and Queen of Denmark generally spend the summer months there, but it has always been difficult to find room for the many visitors who often visit the Danish Court during the summer. The intended enlargements will, however, provide a great deal of additional accommodation. Two wings will be built, one to the east and one to the west of the main building, and these will contain seven apartments on the ground floor, eleven on the first, and twelve on the second floor. The rooms on the ground floor will comprise a large dining-hall with adjoining "Rose." The kitchens will be considerably enlarged and altered; at present they are unpleasantly close to the apartments of the King of Denmark.

THE Czar's birthday present to the Czarina consisted of a splendid necklace formed of forty emeralds, all of exactly the same size and colour.

## STATISTICS.

RUSSIA has the largest standing army of any of the foreign nations—780,000 men, followed by Italy with 750,000, France with 530,000, Germany with 450,000, Great Britain and her possessions with 400,000, China with 300,000, Austria 285,000, and Spain 160,000.

THE following is a list of the heaviest hammers in Europe, from an historical point of view: Fr. Krupp, Essen, 1868, 40 tons; Terni Works, Italy, 1873, 50 tons; Creusot, France, 1887, 80 tons; Cockerill, Belgium, 1885, 100 tons; Fr. Krupp, Essen, 1886, 150 tons. The last is now the heaviest steam-hammer in the world.

THE carrying capacity of a railway truck of ten tons has been figured on by somebody, who gives this as a result: Wheat, 340 bushels; corn, 400 bushels; potatoes, 430 bushels; apples, 370 bushels; oats, 680 bushels; lumber, 6,000 feet; butter, 20,000 pounds; flour, 90 barrels; whisky, 60 barrels; wood, 6 cords; cattle, 18 to 20 head; hogs, 50 to 60 head; and sheep, 80 to 100.

## GEMS.

THERE are no greater prudes than those women who have some secret to hide.

IN the great majority of things, habit is a greater plague than ever afflicted Egypt; in religious character it is a grand felicity.

LOVE is not altogether a delirium, yet it has many points in common therewith. It is rather a discerning of the infinite in the finite, of the ideal made real.

TRUTH is the object of our understanding, as good is of our will; and the understanding can no more be delighted with a lie than the will can choose an apparent evil.

TRUE love is eternal, infinite, and always like itself; it is equal and pure, without violent demonstrations; it is seen with white hairs, and is always young in the heart.

GOOD listeners, whether at the table or elsewhere, are as indispensable as good talkers, for the jest or the story owes the life of its success more to the ear of the listener than to the narrator.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PIE CRUST.—Rub well together one-half cup of lard and one pint of flour; add water enough to make a dough not too stiff; roll out and spread with butter, fold over evenly, and make a second fold in the opposite direction; roll out again, being careful not to squeeze the butter out.

A DELICIOUS PREPARATION OF COLD TURKEY.—Chop one cupful of roast turkey, add half the quantity of bread crumbs, season to taste, add the gravy, if any; if not add sufficient hot water and butter to make very moist; put into small, round dishes, break an egg on the top of each, sprinkle with salt, and place in the oven until the egg is firm; serve while hot.

CHICKEN POT PIE.—Joint the chicken, and parboil it. Make a crust the same as for soda biscuit, line the side of the pot (not the bottom) with this; with the chicken lay in thin sliced potatoes, sprinkle in a little pepper, add salt and a bit of mace. If there was not broth enough left after parboiling the chicken, add water sufficient to cover the chicken when put in the pot; over the whole lay a piece of crust about the thickness of soda biscuit. Fold a towel and put over the pot, and put on the cover. The towel will hold the steam which rises, and prevent its falling back upon the crust to make it heavy. Before putting in the broth it should be thickened a little, and a little butter added.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

A PROCESS for making a substitute for leather from gutta-percha and sulphur has been brought out in France. Raw cotton and oxide of antimony are well mixed with the ingredients, and the whole vulcanized by steam. The artificial leather is said to be useful for making the soles and heels of shoes.

GUILT, though it may attain temporal splendour, can never confer real happiness. The evident consequence of our crimes long survives their commission, and like the ghosts of the murdered, for ever haunt the steps of the malefactor. The paths of virtue, though seldom those of worldly greatness, are always those of pleasantness and peace.

GENTLENESS, which belongs to virtue, is to be carefully distinguished from the mean spirit of cowards and the fawning assent of sycophants. It removes no just right from fear, it gives up no important truth from flattery; it is indeed not only consistent with a firm mind, but it necessarily requires a manly spirit and a fixed principle in order to give it any real value.

THE tallest trees in the world are not in California, but in Australia, one of which is reported on the authority of the official botanist appointed by the British Government to be four hundred and eighty feet high. There are trees in the world of larger girth than those of California, but taking height and size in combination the mammoth trees of California surpass all others.

PRIMITIVE.—A peep into an Italian kitchen takes us back to the days of our grandmothers. The great chimney cap projects out into the room, and gives an antique look to the newest kitchen; under it is a brick hearth raised on an arch to the height of an ordinary table; in this are two or three square holes, called *fornelle*, for the burning of charcoal; behind them is a space for the wood fire, and on the side stands the jack-spit for cooking the roast. There is no oven, except a great brick affair that must be heated by having a fire of light wood built inside of it, and that is rather costly. One can, however, send puddings, cakes and large roasts to the nearest baker's, where they can be baked for a small amount. Almost everything is cooked on the little *fornelle*. They are three or four inches deep, and have a grating bottom; below is an open space that can be closed by a little sliding iron door. When a good fire is needed the cook fans the opening with a fan made of plaited straw or turkey feathers.

CATTLE have more grazing land per head to day than they had a year ago. The increase is twofold, for the number of acres has increased 170,025, while the number of animals has declined 232,851. The probable reason of this curious agricultural event is the extremely low prices at which the Irish farmers have during 1887 been selling their cattle to their Scotch and English brothers. The Irish cattle have accordingly been obtainable for less than it has cost to rear cattle at home. This is a very poor policy, to make ourselves dependent for the sake of a mere temporary cheapness, only who in the present depression can blame our farmers for any act of economy however foolish it might be in the eyes of the capitalist? There is, however, one cardinal fact on which attention should be kept. We have two million more acres of grass kept than we had twenty years ago, and we have five million more months to feed. The cattle in our country should show a large increase in numbers. They do not do so, and it really looks as if meat must soon rise most seriously in price. America has nearly fifty million head of cattle, but the Americans are the greatest meat-eaters in the world, and they are rapidly overtaking their own supplies. All available ranch land is said to be already occupied.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. M.—Lincoln's proclamation abolishing slavery was issued the 1st of January, 1863.

L. T.—The two shades of hair are respectively dead-brown and chestnut colour.

P. T.—You write a good, legible "copying" hand, but are a little careless in spelling.

STAN is a rather pretty girl. Decision and ambition are indicated by the firm mouth and straight features.

PAXER's handwriting, unless disguised, seems that of a refined nature lacking in firmness and self-confidence.

D. H.—The meaning of the verse you quote from the Bible is a warning to princes against the sin of licentiousness.

J. W. B. B.—A local directory will inform you of the place, and, on application, the costs, &c., that you require will be given you.

L. B.—Jealousy is called "The shadow of love, which proves the substance," but we are told that a "Perfect love casteth out fear."

GIANA.—1. We regret we cannot inform you. 2. It is pronounced "Seyras." Both are good handwritings, and Giana seems to be neat and rather precise in disposition, her friend more easy-going.

L. S.—Carbolic acid is not used as a skin cosmetic, but as a disinfectant and purifier. Sour buttermilk, bran-water, rose-water, lemon juice and glycerine all tend to remove sun-tan and freckles.

A. A.—The lady is privileged to speak first on meeting in the street a gentleman she knows. The gentleman should show recognition in his first glance, and respond instantly to her greeting or bow, by speaking or touching his hat.

GWENTHE.—1. Not if the disparity is only a few years, and both are really fond of one another. There have been many instances in our own experience of happy marriages where the man is three or four years younger than the wife. 2. You write a nice hand.

M. J.—If your sisters' fiancé has a serious heart trouble she should never marry him. Her parents, or near relative, should tell him her reason if she feels she cannot do it. There is no harm in attending a dancing-school with a female friend and a gentleman who is not her betrothed.

LAURA.—1. Jael was a Biblical character, the wife of Heber the Kenite, principally noted for killing Sisera, the commander of the army of Jabin, a Canaanitish king, who oppressed the Israelites. The whole affair is detailed in the fourth and fifth chapter of Judges. 2. The moon-shaped plant bears flowers which become small fruit containing a moon-shaped or kidney-shaped seed.

E. E.—It was inconsiderate to "admit the gentleman into the front door" while there was a lady ill in the house if you stood and chatted with him so as to annoy the sick person. If you opened the door softly, talked low a few moments and dismissed your visitor with the excuse of sickness in the house then no harm was done.

M. R.—Book-keeping is a good business for a young woman. You must practise writing and correct some faults in spelling before you can think of it, however. It is not well-bred to converse with a gentleman who has addressed you without being introduced to you, unless the remark is a mere polite or formal question requiring a similar reply. Your hair is seal-brown.

PRIGGE, ADA, AND ELIZA (We do not approve the initials given).—1. Temperance and plenty of open air exercise. 2 & 3. No. 4. There is no specific number; twenty-two inches is about the average. 5. Allhallow's Eve is the 31st of October. 6. You had better consult a fashion book. 7. Poor writing. 8. Phoebe means the "moon," Ada "a princess," Eliza "the oath of the Lord."

EMMELINE writes a very pleasant, chatty letter, in a cultured, legible hand, and is evidently, in her own estimation, a pretty girl with a good figure and very attractive, and, judging from the note, we would not contradict that opinion for the world. The engineer is, no doubt, very much in love, and Emmeline should not tease him too much if in her heart of hearts she cares for him. She should remember that "a fault confessed is half redeemed," and that a celebrated poet once remarked wisely that "the quarrels of lovers are the renewal of love."

E. E.—Wearing low-heeled shoes and a good deal of skirt drapery will lessen your height, in effect. As you grow older your figure will develop, and the awkward feeling wear off. Never mind your large foot—wear a well-fitting, well-made shoe, not too small for you, and your foot will not look out of proportion to your size. Small feet are not now so much sought for as shapely, uncramped ones. Putting the feet in hot water and lacing loosely will remedy the rash of blood to your head. Do nothing with your hair except to keep it clean and well brushed.

B. L. H.—Your love is purely imaginary, as the average school girl, aged but fifteen, is unable to understand the true meaning of the "grand passion," being fitted neither physically nor mentally to understand the duties of a wife. The majority of the human race, both male and female, are afflicted with this affection in early life, and although they think it is love, it can, with truth, be looked upon only as one of the diseases of childhood, to be cured with judicious doses of common sense administered by a stern parent in the shape of lectures and ridicule. Some cases, however, require more heroic treatment, the nature of which it is hardly necessary to describe in this place.

T. T.—Your writing is very plain and clear, but irregular. The indications are of a nature not fully formed, but with excellent possibilities.

F. H.—Refer the query to a neighbouring hardware dealer. You are doubtless aware of the fact that business addresses are debarred from insertion in this column.

W. F.—When the young man sees his way clear to assuming the responsibilities of marriage he will doubtless consult you in the matter of becoming a life-partner.

H. R. S.—Wilkie Collins is still in the land of the living; Charles Reade died on April 11, 1884. A catalogue of the works of these authors is obtainable at a bookseller's news-stand.

W. V.—A lady having a clear white complexion, pink cheeks, dark-blue eyes and golden-aurum hair would be considered by competent judges of female beauty a magnificent specimen of womanhood.

L. M. C.—The name of the author of the romance is plainly stated under the heading as it appears each week in the paper named, and we believe it to be the real name. Our contributors' addresses are not considered public property, and on that account we invariably decline to publish such information.

LETTIE desires us to furnish the moustache flirtation, but being unable to obtain it we are compelled to refer the matter to our readers, some of whom will doubtless be kind enough to help us out of the dilemma by forwarding such code, if it is in existence.

E. N.—1. Your penmanship, which is very neat and legible, will be sure to elicit compliments whenever or wherever it is exhibited. 2. Refer the case to some reputable physician in your immediate vicinity, and do not place so much confidence in advertised nostrums.

E. C.—Business letters should invariably contain the full name and address of the senders, as this department was never intended as a medium for answering such communications. We are not prepared to vouch for the financial standing or reliability of individuals or firms in any portion of the country.

## WHEN THE CLOUDS ROLL AWAY.

The tide rolls in and the tide rolls out,  
While the gay winds lightly play,  
And the clouds float red in the sunset sky,  
At the close of another day.  
And ever they whisper the same old tale  
Of sorrow and joy and hope,  
While the drama of life rolls on and on  
'Neath the glow of the western slope.

Oh, the world as it swings 'neath the sunset clouds,  
Sings over the same old song;  
Some measures are merry and some are sad,  
And others are sweet and strong.  
I hark to the music, and softly sigh,  
That sorrow should ever stay;  
Then laugh for the joy that sweetens it all,  
When the clouds have rolled away.

MAY M. A.

E. A.—The tricolour has been the national badge of France since 1793. It consists of the Bourbon white cockade and the blue and red cockade of the city of Paris combined. Lafayette devised this symbolical union of the king and the people, and when he presented it to the nation, said: "I bring you a cockade that shall make the tour of the world."

M. L.—It cannot be improper for a girl to be modest and reserved. She may carry reserve too far, and be stiff and formal, but this is rarely the case. Nervousness is greatly due to temperament, but may be overcome by cultivating self-possession and paying attention to the health, never overdoing one's self and drinking no very strong coffee or other stimulant. You are a demt-blondie.

E. S. D.—Navigators, or Samoan Islands, are the two names given to a group of nine islands, with some islets, lying in the Pacific Ocean, north of the Friendly Islands. The four principal members of this group are Mauna, Tutuila, Upolu, and Savaili. The latter, 40 miles in length and 20 miles broad, is the largest. With one exception (Rose Island) they are all volcanic in origin, and for the most part are rugged and lofty, rising in some cases to an elevation of 2,500 feet, and covered with the richest vegetation. The soil is very rich and climate moist. Thick forests of bread-fruit, coconut, banana and palm-trees abound, and the orange, lemon, tanna (from which a kind of sago is made), coffee, sweet-potatoes, pine-apples, yams, nutmegs, wild sugar-cane and many other important plants grow luxuriantly. Pigs, cows, and horses were introduced into these islands at a comparatively recent date. The natives are well formed (especially the males), ingenious, intelligent and affectionate, and the majority of them have embraced Christianity. To escape anarchy, the chiefs have repeatedly petitioned to be taken under the protectorate of Great Britain or the United States, and in 1878 a commercial treaty was concluded with the latter government. The following year a treaty granted to Germany the rights of the most favoured nation and conceded a port for the use of the German navy, a similar treaty being concluded with England later in the same year. Not being fully informed, up to the present date, as to the real cause of the seizure of King Mafetua by the Germans, as the reports from the islands are rather meagre, it would be difficult to give a positive answer regarding the justice or injustice of such a proceeding, or whether any treaty rights had been usurped by the naval representatives of Emperor William.

C. H.—1. The Mississippi, together with its great tributary, the Missouri, is the longest river in the world, its total combined length being 4,800 miles. 2. Your penmanship is far above the average.

E. G. S. There is no way to keep her pretty hands from getting so long as she is obliged to do housework and dish-washing. Wear india rubber gloves when you sweep and dust. Use a mop in washing dishes. Rub your hands in warm bran and water at night. Rub a little sweet oil or cream over them, and put on a pair of old kid gloves.

J. N.—Be in no hurry to think that either of the young men are serious in their love-making. Young men are apt to make love to every girl who is easy of access. From your sketch of yourself you must be nice-looking. You write excellently—an almost perfect hand for business purposes. Your hair is dark seal-brown, and in length rivals that of the seven long-haired sisters.

DAISY says she is thirty years old, poor, but good-looking and stylish, and has two suitors. One is a penniless youth of twenty, the other a wealthy man of fifty-four. Which shall she marry? As you are ten years older than the moneyless youth, and admit that you would like luxury for a change, you would do better to marry the rich, elderly lover. Your writing is crude, spelling all right.

BLOOMER.—1. It is decidedly improper and foolish for a lady to correspond with and receive presents from a gentleman whom she has never met. 2. When a gentleman desires to correspond with a lady friend he should, after obtaining her permission, take the first step in writing, and then, if she sees fit, she may answer it. On no account should she open the correspondence. 3. He is still living, and occasionally contributes to these columns.

C. H.—If you have discovered that you can never love your prospective husband, it would be best to so inform him. If he is a sensible, matter-of-fact man, he will take you at your word and release you from the engagement. In a short time it is very probable you will become "infatuated" with No. 3, after having allowed No. 2 to bask in your smiles for a few weeks. To put it mildly, your stock of fidelity is very meagre, as is the case with all confirmed flirts.

EMMA.—Sea-shells are very pretty when polished. There is a great deal of stuff to be worked off the outside of them, however, before the coloured or beautiful portion is reached. This is done by steeping them for some time in diluted nitric acid, and then scraping with a knife and a piece of glass. Fracture on a large mussel-shell first; polish with emery-paper and oil, finishing off with polishers' putty and oil and rouge. These articles may be purchased at a chemist's or paint shop.

C. C.—If nature has ordained that one shall be spare and thin, it is useless to attempt to increase the weight by eating or any other method. A man or woman weighing 147 pounds at the age of eighteen has no reason to complain, as that figure is above the usual average. As you grow older the chances are in favour of an accumulation of flesh, and then in all probability you will be making inquiries as to the easiest and best manner of ridding yourself of what will be likely to prove a burden.

ELLEN.—The lines,

"There's beauty in a merry laugh,  
A moral beauty, too;  
It shows the heart's an honest heart  
That's paid each man his due,  
And lent a share of what's to spare,  
Despite of wisdom's fears,  
And made the cheek lose sorrow's spear,  
The eye weep fewer tears,"

are to be found in a poem entitled "A Merry Heart," but we have been unable to trace its authorship, as it is published anonymously in the authority which we have consulted. Can any of our readers furnish the name of its author?

C. P. R.—1. Black silk would not be a proper wedding costume, either pure white, or, as in the case of a widow's marriage, some neutral tint being required; nor should the guests attend in mourning. Even when black is habitually worn by them, it should, for the time being, give place to grey or some other neutral colour. 2. The bride's parents should furnish her wedding outfit. 3. The costumes of the bridesmaids must take their tone from that of the bride, and be neither lighter, richer nor gayer than hers. 4. Wedding invitations should be sent out three or four weeks prior to the day upon which the ceremony is to be performed, in order that those living at a distance may have an opportunity of attending. 5. Bridal presents are, according to strict etiquette, sent from two weeks to a week previous to the wedding day. 6. Excellent.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 310, New Review, price Sixpence, post free, Eightpence. Also Vol. XLIX., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 354, Strand, W.C.

WE cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 354, Strand, by J. R. SPECK; and Printed by WOODFALL and KNEPP, 60 to 76, Long Acre, W.C.

